

The African Diaspora – Development Nexus: Issues and Implications for Africa

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Abstract

Life is a continuous struggle for survival in a world where man is unable to meet all his needs. The same is applicable to nations and continents. The African continent is in dire need of development of all strands. Essentially, the development of any nation or continent is the collective responsibility of all citizens of the nation or continent including those in the diaspora, who are individuals living outside the continent. They are in more vantage positions to assist by virtue of their dual experiences, technical know-how, valuable networks and access to significant technology and capital. The African Union is aware of this strategic quality of the diaspora and recognizes it as a ‘sixth region’ of the African Union, thereby emphasizing its importance to Africa’s development trajectory. Positioned as a literature-based conceptual review, the paper employs the transnationalism theory as a theoretical framework for analyzing how leveraging the contributions of the Diasporas can transform Africa. However, the paper contends that much as the importance of their contributions to the development of Africa cannot be overemphasized, most African governments have not adequately mobilized their citizens in the diaspora for their country’s development. This paper therefore recommends that African leaders should create the enabling environment for the mobilization of the Diasporas for homeland development.

Keywords: African, Diaspora, Development, Enabling Environment, Mobilization

1 Introduction

Development is the attainment of a condition in which citizens of a nation can access the minimum requirements for an enhanced living standard. It is the ultimate desire of any nation that wants to improve the material conditions of its people. It is also one of the most important issues in the governance of any nation and it is highly discussed in academic discourses. It is a determining factor in the categorization of nations of the world, hence, nations of the world are grouped into developed, developing and underdeveloped. In the contemporary international system, development not only determines a nation's material prosperity but also its capacity to assert itself politically, economically and diplomatically. For most African nations, the quest for development is especially critical due to history of colonization, exploitative economic structures, governance deficits, and socio-political instability. Ake (1996) states that post-independence Africa has grappled with persistent challenges ranging from poverty and unemployment to technological backwardness and fragile state institutions. These are conditions that are antithetical to the development of a nation.

In any case, Africa continues to strive to become developed with a view to improving the material conditions of its citizens. Numerous efforts have been made at various levels both nationally and internationally to address issues mitigating Africa's development, and several strategies have been devised to achieve this but one strategy worth exploring is the mobilization of Africans in diaspora for the much needed development of African nations due to the vantage positions they are occupying which affords them the opportunity to play critical roles in Africa's development.

Africans in the diaspora are many and come from different countries of the continent. They reside across Europe, North America, the Caribbean, Asia and Latin America. These individuals are not only economically productive members of their host societies but also possess a wealth of knowledge, skills, technological exposure, and access to global networks. According to the African Union (2020), the diaspora is the 'sixth region' of Africa, with the potential to contribute significantly to the continent's economic and social transformation.

This paper not only explores how Africans overseas can contribute to Africa's development trajectory but also the downsides of their contribution. It also looks at the continent's developmental challenges and ways of overcoming them. It is the contention of this paper that should the Diasporas be adequately

mobilized through the provision of enabling policies, they can turn round the development fortunes of Africa. They have been positioned to act as important bridges between Africa and the developed world through economic contributions, innovation, political engagements and institution-building. But they must be uniquely leveraged upon by leaders of African nations, development institutions and the Diaspora community itself to achieve this transformative role for Africa's development.

2 Theoretical Framework

Transnationalism theory is adopted as a framework for the analysis of this paper. Transnationalism theory made its debut in the late twentieth century following the work of Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Lanc in their pioneering book, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (1994). This work prepared and watered the ground for transnationalism which they defined as 'the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement' (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc 1994). Their work countered the claims made by classical migration theories that migration gradually but eventually separates migrants from their countries of origin permanently. Transnationalism theory argues that migrants never sever links or ties with their countries of origin as they continue to relate with both their home and host countries in various ways. Transnationalism theory views migrants as people with dual and often times, multiple identities, experiences, loyalties and networks which are used positively for both the host and home countries. Migrants therefore act as bridges between their home and host countries.

The theory was further amplified by the works of other scholars such as Steven Vertovec (1999; 2004) who highlighted the economic, political, cultural, and social dimensions of transnationalism. Vertovec maintains that transnationalism is about the entrenched cross-border relationships, patterns of exchange, and institutions that bring about development outcomes in both sending and receiving countries. The outputs of transnationalism among other things include remittances, knowledge and skill transfers, research collaborations, business investments, political participation, and social remapping of identities, etc.

The deployment of transnationalism theory is appropriate in analyzing the role of diaspora in development as it views migrants as active participants

in development efforts of two countries, their home and host countries rather than passive victims of displacement or contributors to the ‘brain drain’ Syndrome. By virtue of their dual engagements, migrants facilitate the flow of financial capital, human capital, technology, and ideas to their countries of origin (Faist 2000) and at the same time, contribute to the development of their host countries by the work they do and the tax they pay. This perspective is in tandem with contemporary development thinking that recognizes migration as a potential catalyst for growth, innovation, and institutional change.

Transnationalism theory is very relevant in analyzing this paper because it provides understanding on how Africans in the diaspora contribute to the development of the continent through remittances, skills transfer, entrepreneurial ventures, advocacy, institutional partnerships and research collaborations, etc. The African Diasporas are in the vantage position of having acquired advanced technological knowledge, skills and even capital which they willingly transfer to Africa not minding that they reside overseas. They also have access to global markets and professional networks, all of which are needed for Africa’s transformation; they give out all these for Africa’s development (Adepoju 2008).

Again, Transnationalism theory also discusses the role of states and institutions in promoting or abetting diaspora engagement. While the diaspora may be favourably disposed to assist in their homeland development, the role of the state cannot be overemphasized as supportive government roles through policies, trust-building mechanisms, and institutional frameworks can make or mar their developmental impact (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004). Thus, the theory not only analyses and explains diaspora–development nexus but also offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing cross-border connections, migrant agency, and the development potential of sustained transnational engagements.

3 Africans in the Diaspora

Diaspora notion is not a new phenomenon as it has been discussed in antiquity in relation to the dispersal of the Greek and Jewish people after the destruction of the Temple and the annexation of Judea by Romans. Diasporas can be defined as ‘national migrant communities living in interaction among themselves and with their country of origin’ (Assogba 2002). Diaspora generally refers to the movement of people away from their original countries to other nations. Reasons for moving away from one’s country of origin can be

varied but the important thing is that one moves away to other countries and still clings unto the country of origin tenaciously, in the sense that the feeling of being a member of the country of origin is not forgotten irrespective of whatever happens or whatever one becomes in the new country. It is in this sense that the African Union defines the African Diasporas as all ‘people of African origin living outside of 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’ (African Union). Some of the Diasporas may no longer have connections with their lands of origins, but in their innermost heart and actions, they still remember and act in favour of their lands of origin.

The notion of diaspora in Africa is traced to the forced evacuation of African people to other countries occasioned by the Transatlantic Slave Trade (16th - 19th century). Shepperson (1966) describes this phenomenon as the dispersal of Africans in all countries of the globe due, firstly to slavery, then colonization and again on one’s own free will. Palmer (2000) also sees the African diaspora from this angle of international dispersion of African people to various parts of the world originating from the transatlantic slave trade. In any case, the diaspora phenomenon is today intertwined with migration; it has both economic and political dynamics and is shaping development in all countries of the world including Africa. However, the African experience of it started with forced migration.

Despite the fact that the African diaspora phenomenon started with slavery, it has endured and has been transformed and is being seen from the vantage point of a common identity of Africans residing in other countries of the world. They are now being seen as a community. For Cohen (1997), despite being scattered across multiple territories, the African diaspora constitutes a community of people who have retained a sense of common identity and homeland. This situates the diaspora in terms of shared consciousness. The implication is that diasporic identity is not only about geographic dispersal but also about cultural memory, solidarity, and collective identity tied to Africa, (Cohen 1977).

Africans in the diaspora continue to exhibit cultural, linguistic, and spiritual connections to their African ancestry, Asante (2008). From an Afrocentric perspective, traditional, cultural, linguistic, political and economic ties are important issues in the discussion of the African diaspora phenomenon. This is because there is need for cultural continuity and identity maintenance as the diaspora serve as the living repository of African traditions and values

even in foreign environments. Tölölyan (1996) describes Diasporas, as people emerging from displacement from their lands of origin but yet remain connected to a homeland through emotional, cultural, and political ties.

Nevertheless, Africans in the diaspora can be categorized into three main groups, each identified by the period they left Africa to other countries of the world. The pioneer African Diasporas, also known as historical Diasporas, were those forced out of Africa due to the Transatlantic Slave Trade between the 16th and the 17th century. There is need to differentiate this set of African diaspora from other Africans who moved to Europe or America on their own accord in the 1960s. This is essentially because the Africans forced into migration as a result of slavery blended more into local populations and most of them lost connections with their lands of origin. They see Africa as their place of origin; many no longer know which countries of Africa they originated from. However, they may have lost contact with their lands of origin but they still know they are Africans symbolically. To this extent, many of them love Africa and are ever ready to assist Africa. Some of them are antagonistic to Africans, anyway. Again, part of African Diasporas in the period ranging from the 15th century up until 1960 migrated to Europe as a result of Africa's encounter with colonialism and the colonial labour policy which gave them the opportunity to migrate to, and settle in Europe thereby becoming Diasporas. Therefore, there are many African Diasporas in several countries of Europe who belong to the older generation of African Diasporas who were not affected by the slave trade.

The second group of African Diasporas were Africans who migrated to settle in other countries especially the colonialist countries. This was occasioned by the conducive atmosphere for migration created by colonial contact. After the independence of many African countries, there arose strong economic and cultural ties between the colonialist countries and members of the colonized countries of Africa enabling many Africans to migrate to Europe; and others, to America on their own, mainly for educational advancement and improvement of living conditions. This situation enabled many to settle in these countries thereby forming diaspora communities. This period can be classified as a period of 'voluntary migration'.

The aftermath of independence brought much trouble to the African continent as most countries then began to experience self- rule with the attendant struggles for political power leading to party formations which occasioned cleavages and conflicts of various dimensions. Succession to power brought election with electoral violence and political persecutions as

aftermaths. Bad leadership brought about corruption and mismanagement of the economy, all leading to hardship and poverty which occasioned disenchantment with the living standards in many African countries. This led many Africans to migrate out of Africa. Beginning from the 1980's, many Africans left the continent as a result of State failures, wars, hopeless poverty or political persecution, (Adepoju 2005). The African Diasporas of this period can be classified as the third African Diaspora group.

Currently, Africa is rated as one continent that has a large number of her citizens in the Diaspora. Their numerical strength, value and contributions to their host countries are such that cannot be ignored when searching for resources and strategies for Africa's development in today's contemporary world. Many nations of Africa are already mobilizing them for the development of their countries while some are dragging their feet.

Table illustrating African Diaspora Population Estimates

S/No.	Country	Estimated Population (M)
1.	Brazil	108.2
2.	United States	46.4
3.	Haiti	11.0
4.	Dominican Republic	8.5
5.	Mexico	6.3
6.	Venezuela	5.8
7.	Colombia	4.9
8.	France	4.4
9.	Cuba	4.0
10.	United Kingdom	3.3
11.	Jamaica	2.9
12.	Ecuador	1.3
13.	Canada	1.2
14.	Trinidad and Tobago	0.8

Source: TELL Communications Ltd. (2024, October 19). *The African diaspora: Over 350 million strong, a global force reshaping culture, economy, and identity.*

TELL Magazine. <https://tell.ng/the-african-diaspora-over-350-million-strong-a-global-force-reshaping-culture-economy-and-identity/>

4 What the African Diasporas are Capable of Doing and Are Doing in Africa's Development

The African diaspora is a politically relevant actor capable of influencing both host and home countries through advocacy, remittances, and cultural diplomacy. The following are some of the contributions Africans in the diaspora are capable of making and some are already playing these roles in Africa's development.

4.1 Economic Contribution

The African diaspora has much economic power which is reflected through remittances; this consistently outpace official development assistance (ODA) and foreign direct investment (FDI) in several African countries. However, beyond remittances, the diaspora's economic roles are broad and transformative as discussed below:

Remittances: Diaspora communities send billions of dollars annually to Africa, and these often serve as lifelines for families and also contribute to national economies. Many African families are sustained back home by the money sent by their relations overseas. Without the financial intervention of the Diasporas, a greater percentage of African youths will be out of school. The same is applicable to the sick. The money sent by Africans in the diaspora helps in paying the medical bills of their relations back home. They also send money for community development such as hospitals, schools, etc.

Investment and Entrepreneurship: Many diaspora members are engaged in business ventures across the continent, investing in sectors such as agriculture, technology, real estate, and renewable energy. They enjoy the advantage of two world experiences as well as capital at their disposal more than those in Africa. This gives them the latitude of taking risks as well as trying their ideas on innovative ventures. As a result, some industries have been established in many African countries through the instrumentality of the Diasporas.

It can be authoritatively said that the contributions of African Diasporas in areas of finance, entrepreneurship, and human-capital development are fueling Africa's growth as remittances now exceed other external flows, diaspora-led investment fosters innovation and infrastructure, and returning professionals transfer skills and knowledge to local economies (Anyanwu &

Gnimassoun 2019; World Economic Forum 2024).

Diaspora Bonds and Funds: Many capital intensive projects have been carried out in Africa through diaspora bonds and funds created by some African governments. African governments realized that the diaspora have the capacity to raise fund and in order to do that, they try to create innovative financial instruments which target diaspora investors .The funds generated are utilized in financing infrastructure development projects. For example, the government of Ethiopia issued a ‘Millennium Corporate Bond’ worth about \$56 million and which targeted Ethiopians at home/abroad through the state-owned power company. This helped to fund the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) (Xinhua 2018). Also in 2017, Nigeria raised \$300 million via its 2017 diaspora bond to support infrastructure development (Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission [NIPC] 2017).

Trade Facilitation: The Diasporas are people of more than two world experiences; having been in Africa and now in other countries of the world, they have the opportunity of knowing both the African and international markets. In terms of trade, they can market African products especially raw materials and others to those who need them overseas. Equally, they can also market overseas goods to Africa nations. They are therefore capable of turning around Africa’s business fortunes by marketing African products, including engaging in cultural exports and agribusiness, etc.

4.2 Knowledge and Skills Transfer

Many Africans went overseas in quest of the Golden Fleece. They studied professional courses and are today working as professionals in their host countries with their advanced and sophisticated technologies. They are exposed to current knowledge in science and technology. Some other Africans working overseas acquired skills which gave them the impetus to work. Together with the intellectuals, they possess vast and relevant knowledge that can significantly impact youth development in Africa. The Diasporas can offer mentoring in digital technology, virtual workshop; they can also engage in collaborative research with African intellectuals, share experiences in technological innovations, entrepreneurship and leadership (Adeoye 2022). Knowledge and skill transfer foster creativity and employability as well as accelerated economic growth. When all these happen, African youths become empowered.

Digital mentorship, online learning platforms, exchange programs and learning innovation hubs should be established to strengthen the connectivity between African Diasporas and African youth. The essence is to create a channel through which professionals abroad can share expertise in technology, entrepreneurship, and research with the youth in Africa (World Bank 2021). Essentially, knowledge and skill transfers from the diaspora to young Africans perform the strategic role of bridging global and local knowledge gaps, which hinder youth development in Africa. When this gap is filled, young Africans are empowered to become key drivers of sustainable development, youth empowerment, and stronger socio-economic ties between Africa and its diaspora are built (African Union Commission & OECD 2020). By connecting diaspora networks, Africa can transform its youth into drivers of progress and innovation (African Development Bank 2022).

Professional Expertise: As mentioned above, many Africans became diasporas in a bid to become professionals and having achieved that, they work overseas and are now in a position to use their professional expertise for the good of Africa by contributing to Africa's development through direct services and provision of professional expertise in their relevant sectors like health, education, engineering, and governance (World Bank 2021). By so doing, Africans in the diaspora contribute to the development of human capital; they also promote entrepreneurship, and accelerate sustainable growth across the continent (African Union Commission & OECD 2020).

Mentorship and Coaching: African Diasporas also assist the continent's development through mentorship by which they transfer knowledge, infuse the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship in Africans. It is important to note that in order to fit into the system and become productive, many Africans overseas had to learn one skill or the other and today they are providing various assistance to their relations back home through guidance and connections to professional networks from where they are exposed to global perspectives on various enterprises. By so doing, they are helping to bridge the continent's skills and opportunity gaps (Adebayo 2021). Virtual mentorship and collaboration are tools through which Africans in the diaspora are contributing to human capital development and institutional strengthening in Africa (African Union 2020). They may not come home to physically teach their fellow Africans but by the aid of virtuals, they can impart knowledge on those back home. Therefore, instead of being losses to Africa – 'brain drain', their

assistance have become ‘brain gain’ to the continent and are promoting sustainable growth and inclusive development across sectors of the African economy (Okonjo-Iweala 2022). We can therefore say that by virtue of the advanced knowledge and skills they gained in foreign lands, the Diasporas can and do mentor young African entrepreneurs, academics, and civil servants through formal and informal channels.

Academic and Research Partnerships: There are partnerships and collaborations taking place between African diaspora academics and home-based scholars. This no doubt, can significantly advance Africa’s development. Having acquired advanced knowledge and working in foreign universities and industries; and being willing to assist, the Diasporas engage in collaborative initiatives with African universities to expand research output, curriculum reform, and faculty development. This is already taking place in many African higher institutions.

There are areas of comparative advantage between Diaspora academics and local researchers. While diaspora academics can provide global expertise, mentorship, and access to funding networks, local researchers can provide contextual understanding and indigenous knowledge (Tebeje 2020). When they combine, innovation in education, technology, and policy are fostered to address challenges like climate change and health inequities, etc. (Mohamoud 2018). Today such initiatives like the Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Program exists to demonstrate how brain circulation replaces brain drain and how higher education and research ecosystems are being strengthened by the Diasporas (Carnegie Corporation of New York 2022). This is Pan-African solidarity in action aimed at promoting sustainable growth from within and beyond the African continent.

Technology Transfer: One area where the assistance of Africans in the diaspora is needed very urgently is in the area of technology transfer to home communities. Without technology, Africa’s development will take time to happen or may not come too easy. Africa does not have modern technology but they have Africans in the diaspora who have acquired much of it and who are making waves in Europe and America by their accomplishments. Diaspora engagement in technology transfer is capable of accelerating the introduction of digital tools, platforms, and innovations which can help Africa leapfrog development hurdles in health tech, fintech, and edtech, etc.

This initiative can be achieved through collaborative innovation hubs,

digital platforms, and diaspora-led mentorship programs. It is recommended that Governments of African nations and institutions create the enabling environments by ways of policies which encourage diaspora investment in technology startups and research partnerships (Akinwale 2020). In order to bridge the skill gaps and foster sustainable development in Africa, knowledge exchange networks must be established (Ndemo & Weiss 2017). Equally, Africa must leverage remittances for technology-driven projects which can promote inclusive growth. Again, trust and connectivity between diaspora professionals and local innovators must be strengthened to ensure mutual benefit so as to empower Africa's technological ecosystem and drive socio-economic transformation (Mavhunga 2017).

4.3 Advocacy and Representation

Africans in the diaspora are capable of bringing about Africa's development through advocacy and representation routed through strategic pathways such as policy advocacy, image-building, civic engagement and political representation, as well as support for African causes.

Being citizens of two worlds; the Pan African council notes that African Diaspora communities can leverage policy advocacy by influencing both host-country and home-country decision-making. They are in a position to reach out to their foreign colleagues to make changes in certain laws, policies and regulations that affect Africa; they are also capable of causing members of their host countries change their perceptions about Africa. They can also influence pro-Africa policies which are for the advancement of the continent., Pan-African Council (n.d) The African Union's Diaspora Division also underlines the fact that the diaspora should be mobilized and encouraged to participate in the building and transforming the African continent (The Africa Union (2005).

The Diasporas being ambassadors of Africa in whatever country they are, are also in a position to polish the image of Africa and change the negative narratives and perceptions about Africa through image-building to their host countries. By promoting African heritage, culture and enterprise abroad, they help shift long-standing stereotypes and attract investment or tourism for Africa. For example, diaspora networks are being used to reconnect globally with Africa not merely as a donor-recipient relationship, but as partnership-driven, first-among-equals collaboration.

4.4 African Union

In the realm of civic engagement and political representation, diaspora members can serve as bridge-voices linking African concerns with global platforms. They can engage in electoral politics, run for offices in their host countries, lobby for African-friendly legislations in host countries, or assume advisory roles in home-country governance. Some Africans are engaged in party politics and stand for election overseas. Some Africans have won elections and are members of parliaments in some oversea countries. Being in fora where legislations are made on sundry issues including those pertaining to Africa, they cannot but lobby and win good legislations on issues that advance Africa's development. This representation strengthens accountability, participation and ensures diaspora interests align with African development goals.

Lastly, diaspora involvement in support for African causes through remittances, investment, knowledge-transfer and philanthropic initiatives serves as an engine of growth beyond traditional aid flows. For instance, migration and diaspora engagement are recognized by the African Development Bank and International Organization for Migration as key elements in converting human mobility into development outcomes (African Development Bank 2018).

Summarily, when Africans in the diaspora mobilize their resources, influence and networks towards policy advocacy, image-building, civic engagement and political representation as well as support for African causes, they become stakeholders in an Africa-owned development agenda rather than peripheral contributors.

5 Challenges Facing Diaspora Engagement in Africa

Much as the Diasporas have the capacity and capability to assist in Africa's development in various ways, there are impediments to this imperative.

5.1 Policy and Institutional Gaps

Experiences over the years have shown that engagement of the African diaspora in Africa's transformation is a desideratum, yet, policy and institutional gaps have bedeviled the initiative. Challenges such as lack of coherent diaspora engagement policies, weak institutional capacity and fragmented coordination continue to make a mess of the efforts by the Diasporas and international donor agencies. Except for few African countries such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana

and Kenya, many other African countries lack coordinated diaspora engagement policies. Where there is any, they fail to integrate existing ones into their national development frameworks with the resultant effect of fragmented and short-term initiatives (EUDiF 2021). Again, most leaderships of African countries lack the political will to factor in the Diasporas into their development agenda for fear of hijacking their country's leadership. They therefore stave agencies they create for diaspora engagement of funds and efficient manpower (ICMPD 2021).

Added to the above issues is the manifest absence of trust between the home governments and the diaspora communities. The Diasporas are wary of bureaucratic bottleneck, corruption and inefficiencies as well as weak legal protections for any investment back home (ALN Academy 2023). As a result, they are discouraged from investing in the economic, political, educational and social development of the homelands. Coupled with all the above-mentioned challenges, there is no reliable data about the numerical strength of the Diasporas and their capacities and capabilities which would inform the home government of areas where the Diasporas can assist in Africa's development (NIDCOM 2024).

There is therefore, an urgent need for reforms that will foster *policy coherence*, institutional strengthening, and transparent governance frameworks so as to assure the Diasporas of protection while engaging in Africa's development. Without these reforms, Africa risks underutilizing a critical development resource capable of driving multiple goodies – innovation, investment, and knowledge transfer for the continent.

5.2 Political and Governance Challenges

The Diasporas despite their known potentials- financial and intellectual contributions, are continuously neglected in national planning processes thereby making them feel marginalized. Again, they are not accorded the degree of recognition due to them in the governance of the country. Till date, they are not yet allowed to vote in their countries' election which is one of the democratic rights of every citizen of a nation.

Certain inadequacies of government in Africa such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and impunity of leaders which translates to lack of application of the rule of law in dealing with citizens impede diaspora engagement; this also discourages diaspora investment and participation (Ratha & Plaza 2020). Policy somersault is another factor which discourages

the diaspora from engagement with Africa as unclear policies and restrictive regulations limit opportunities for diaspora-led entrepreneurship and knowledge transfer. Such governance gaps undermine trust and reduce the willingness of skilled professionals abroad from collaborating with local institutions (African Union 2022).

Moreover, in many African countries, political instability and unstable leadership transitions disrupt long-term development initiatives. Political instability which brings about frequent policy changes in addition to lack of accountability - the hallmark of most African governments make it difficult for diaspora investors to predict and manage risks (Mohamoud 2019). Experiences of corrupt practices which lead to diversion of resources from productive projects make the diaspora skeptical about the effectiveness of governance systems (Transparency International 2023).

To address these challenges, African governments need to strengthen transparency, ensure policy consistency, and establish diaspora engagement frameworks. By promoting good governance and accountability, the continent can better harness the diaspora's potential for sustainable development.

The greatest impediment to diaspora engagement with Africa's development is *insecurity*. African Diasporas are afraid of engaging, even traveling or returning to Africa due to security challenges ranging from wars, terrorism, conflicts, banditry, kidnaping and impunity of leaders in most regions of Africa. Diasporas value their lives, and even though, they would want to participate in ventures aimed at the development of the continent, once they remember that their safety is not guaranteed, they develop cold feet and distance themselves from participating and engagement.

5.3 Economic and Investment Barriers

Diaspora engagement in Africa's development is often hampered by economic and investment barriers with lack of favourable investment environment as a major obstacle. Major characteristics of the obstacles which discourage the Diasporas mostly include but not limited to bureaucratic red tape, weak property rights, inconsistent tax and unfavorable legal frameworks (Cadremit 2024). Investing in Africa at all is a risk but is more complicated by a combination of complex administrative procedures and corruption; these issues discourage Diasporas from investing in any productive venture in Africa.

The absence of reliable diaspora financial contribution instruments such as diaspora bonds, pooled funds, or specialized investment platforms

make it difficult for diaspora contribution to Africa's development. This lacuna restricts structured participation of African Diasporas in local development (Brookings Institution 2023). This is because means of contributing funds to development programmes and projects in the absence of these instruments disrupts their contribution.

Foreign policy strategies for financial engagements pose critical challenges to diaspora investors in Africa. There are disparities in exchange rates, limitations on profit for transferred funds as well as currency instability. They increase transaction costs and deter long-term engagement of the diaspora in Africa's development (Business Day 2024). In all, these constraints disrupt the transformative potential of diaspora capital.

To counter the debilitating effects of these hindrances, African governments need to carry out institutional reforms deliberately aimed at strengthening investment governance. They also need to develop reliable and secure diaspora financial instruments; liberalize exchange regimes and foster trust so as to sustain diaspora participation in Africa's development.

5.4 Social and Psychological Factors

Social and psychological dynamics significantly determine the extent to which the African diaspora engages in the continent's development. *Lack of trust* between diaspora members and local institutions mars diaspora engagement in Africa's development due to personal and shared experiences of encounter with corruption, mismanagement, and opaque governance structures which more often than not, discourage diaspora investment and collaboration (Moyo 2018). For fear of misuse and outright loss, many Diasporas prefer to direct their efforts elsewhere.

Third- and second-generation diaspora members suffer identity crisis which act as impediment to their contribution to Africa's development. Because they are not deep rooted in African culture and tradition due to their partial origins, there is identity disconnect, whereby generations born or raised abroad are perceived as having weakened emotional ties to their ancestral homelands making them become detached from African affairs. It therefore limits their inclination to participate in developmental initiatives or to repatriate skills and resources (Adepoju 2020).

Another barrier to diaspora engagement in Africa's development is the brain drain versus brain gain tension which bring confusion between those who left Africa in quest of greener pastures and those still in Africa. While

migration often robs Africa of her skilled workforce, the potential for brain gain—through remittances, knowledge transfer, and transnational networks—remains underutilized (Docquier & Rapoport 2019). Persistent socio-political instability and limited institutional support prevent effective mobilization of diaspora expertise.

Therefore, there is need to integrate every African overseas into the diaspora community so that they are made to contribute to Africa's development. This can be done by addressing these social and psychological barriers through trust-building, inclusive identity frameworks, and enabling policies for the transformation of Africa's diaspora from a distant observer into an active developmental partner.

5.5 Inadequate Communication and Outreach Mechanisms

Inadequate communication and outreach mechanism continue to act as hindrances to effective diaspora engagement in Africa's development. As a result of *inadequate diaspora mapping*, many States of Africa lose out in harvesting the potentials of their Diasporas. This limits governments' and institutions' ability to design targeted policies and initiatives. Many governments of Africa lack comprehensive diaspora databases, making it difficult to identify and mobilize skilled professionals abroad. Lack of information deprives people who are interested to invest in Africa of what is available and where it can be found. It also hinders collaboration between Africans overseas and their brothers back home.

Communication channels are important in the dissemination of information. Most governments lack clear channels of information flow to and from their Diasporas. They also lack adequate knowledge of *who is who and who is what and who is where* among their Diasporas. As a result of lack of reliable and current data on diaspora professionals, many governments are always at a loss on how to locate her professionals overseas. Most times, they rely on outdated or fragmented systems to reach their Diasporas, leading to inconsistent and inefficient information flow (Kifle & Desta 2020). There is therefore need for robust digital platforms or coordinated communication channels to reach potential diaspora contributors to Africa's development priorities. There is also need to channel information on Africa's development priorities to the Diasporas for engagement.

Opportunities for both African governments and diaspora professionals on capacities and capabilities towards solving Africa's development

challenges abound, but visibility of opportunities on both sides are lacking, thereby denying Africa diaspora engagements in Africa development. For instance, investment opportunities, development programs, and partnership schemes targeting the diaspora are often not widely publicized, thereby having minimal participation (World Bank 2022). The resultant effect is that professional and skilled African Diasporas lack reliable entry points for engagement in economic transformation of the continent. Addressing these communication barriers requires data-driven outreach strategies, enhanced digital engagements, and proactive information sharing to strengthen diaspora–homeland relations and unlock Africa’s full development potential.

5.6 Legal and Citizenship Barriers

Inability to accommodate Diaspora Africans with dual citizenship deprives many African countries of development inputs of their Diasporas just as ambiguous legal status do. Unclear and confusing rules about status, property ownership, voting rights or residency issues have combined to deprive some African states of the contributions of their citizens in the diaspora. Situations have made many Africans have dual citizenship and what does it remove an African country according dual citizenship to such Africans in so far as they contribute to Africa’s development. If one is not accorded his rightful status in a country he belongs, he may not have the moral obligation to contribute to its development by means of investment (Ratha 2011).

Some legal issues pertaining to ownership of properties or business registration as well as bureaucratic bottleneck discourage some Diasporas from engagement in Africa’s economic development (The Habari Network 2020). Equally, the same barriers hinder Africa from harvesting the dividends of African professional services, capital, skills and networks. In order to tap from the potentials of its diaspora, African governments must reform its legal frameworks to accommodate inclusive citizenship (Ratha 2011; The Habari Network 2020).

5.7 Limited Engagement Platforms

The contributions of information and communication technology to the development of the world today cannot be overemphasized. It has made the world a global village. It has brought about the creation of multiple platforms from where people get information about the world and in particular, things

they cherish and what concerns them most. The absence of diaspora networks between Africa and her diasporas as well as among the diasporas, have made many Africans at home and in the diaspora to be excluded from useful information that would have aided the development of the continent.

Many countries of Africa have not harnessed their diaspora into formal associations that can relate officially with her governments and institutions. This has significantly hampered any meaningful relation with its government. In this contemporary age when digital and institutional linkages, networks, collaborative efforts on investment, knowledge transfer and policy advocacy are tools with which Diasporas are engaging with her people, any country that fails to mobilize its diaspora into associations and the likes, risks abandonment of her diaspora. It is a demonstrated fact that diaspora networks are boosted by reliable connectivity and structured platforms which enable transnational cooperation (Meyer 2022). It is important that regional digital frameworks and inclusive policies that foster innovation and socioeconomic growth across the continent are strengthened for the sake of Africa's development trajectory (Adepoju & Moyo 2023).

5.8 Limited Inclusion of Women and Youth in the Diaspora

Today, there is a growing recognition of the role of African Diasporas in driving development in Africa, yet women and youth seem not to be included seriously in these engagements. There are structural barriers, such as gender bias, unequal access to resources, and limited representation in policymaking, which marginalize women and youths (Adebayo 2022).

With a restless, innovative and budding youth population, Africa stands to gain tremendously from the innovative and vibrant ideas of her youth. Youth and women are known for their genuine contribution of innovative ideas, skills and investments, yet they have a number of challenges in influencing development agendas in Africa (Okeke 2023). This is because strategies that ensure equitable participation of women and youth in many African diaspora programs are not factored into institutional frameworks (African Union 2021).

Strengthening inclusive policies and creating targeted initiatives that empower women and young people could significantly enhance Africa's socioeconomic transformation. Their inclusion would not only foster diversity in decision-making but also promote sustainable and inclusive development across the continent (Nwosu & Diallo 2024).

6 Potential Downsides of Diaspora Engagement in Africa's Development

In discussing African diaspora - development nexus, it is important to point out that much as the role of the diaspora in the development of Africa is celebrated, there is need to be wary of this initiative because of its obvious negative consequences if not controlled. In this case, there is need to interrogate the potential downsides of sustained cross-border engagements. While diaspora engagements in Africa is capable of maintaining social, economic, and political ties across national boundaries (Basch *et al.* 1994), there are implicit structural tensions and contradictions that may undermine development outcomes in Africa.

An obvious downside of remittance to Africa from the diaspora is the potential dependency syndrome associated with it. Remittances from the diaspora has been the Diasporas' most obvious contribution to Africa's development so far. This has to a great extent, provided household income to many African families and even communities and generally, provided foreign exchange which has boosted the growth of the African economy. Today in many countries of Africa, the risk of remittance dependency is an economic reality. Experts warn that while remittances are a central feature of transnational economic practices, excessive reliance on them may weaken domestic productive capacity and reduce state accountability in development financing (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004). A situation could arise whereby families and communities instead of making individual and collective efforts to better their lots economically, may idly wait for funds from their brothers and sisters overseas. This has the tendency of weakening incentives for domestic productivity and employment creation. Again, overdependence on diaspora inflows could expose African economies to external shocks arising from economic downturns in host countries.

In Africa, social networks based on kinship, ethnicity, or locality determine transnational practices such as remittances, investments, and philanthropic activities. This implies that diaspora engagements are unevenly distributed. The implication is that diaspora engagements in Africa bring about unequal development outcomes. This is another major downside of diaspora engagement as it makes distribution of transnational resources to be unevenly distributed. In this sense, Faist (2000) notes that transnational social spaces are inherently selective. The implication is that benefits tend to accrue to specific communities rather than the broader national population. This selective distri-

bution of diaspora inflows has the tendency of deepening regional and socio-economic inequalities, thereby, contradicting inclusive development goals.

Another downside of diaspora engagement in Africa's development is their contribution to political tensions and legitimacy challenges. Transnationalism encourages diaspora participation in home country politics and Diasporas often try to influence government processes and policies through funding and distant mobilization. With enormous resources including funds and networks at their disposal, there is the possibility of creating political polarization and fueling conflict dynamics in many fragile states of Africa. Such engagement may generate legitimacy and accountability concerns (Vertovec 2004). This forms part of the reason for the mutual mistrust between the diaspora and the home government which makes most African governments display nonchalant attitude towards mobilization of the diaspora for homeland development. In actual fact, there are situations where diaspora groups have been implicated in fueling political instability in their countries of origin. There are cases where they have helped in financing the overthrow of the home government.

In recent times, migration which used to be the common cause of brain drain is being looked upon in migration studies as the precursor of brain gain. This is because of the perceived positive impact of brain circulation occasioned by migration. Transnationalism theory contends that migrants do contribute knowledge and skill virtually but empirical evidences abound to demonstrate that in many cases, such knowledge and skills transferred virtually do not endure in the long run. Therefore, there is a limit to which transnational knowledge transfer can go, Virtual or short-term engagements often fail to offset the long-term effects of brain drain (Adepoju 2008) especially in the health, education, and engineering sectors. Today, Africa continues to experience the shortage of skilled professionals in key sectors such as health and education, revealing the limits of transnational knowledge transfer.

Despite the perceived contributions of transnational engagements to Africa's development, institutional weakness in many African states continues to constrain the developmental impact of transnational engagements. Transnationalism makes no pretense of the fact that cross-border practices operate within broader political and institutional contexts (Basch *et al.* 1994). This is a fact that diaspora engagement cannot change. Therefore, the impact of political and institutional environments will continue to affect the development of a nation despite diaspora engagements. Where governance is weak, diaspora initiatives may be adversely affected by policy somersault, corruption, and

political instability, leading to mistrust and disengagement. In such contexts, transnational ties may reproduce rather than resolve structural development challenges.

Finally, authenticity or being oneself is important in life. Unfortunately diaspora engagement in Africa can bring about the reproduction of overseas initiatives that do not align with the continent's values, culture and tradition. This is one area where diaspora engagement poses great danger to Africa, namely, reproduction of external dependency. In attempts to assist in Africa's development, the diaspora could give the condition that their initiatives must meet global standard, in which case they must follow Western development models that are inimical to African social, cultural and institutional contexts. This is antithetical to local ownership, indigenous knowledge systems, and grassroots development initiatives.

Conclusively, much as diaspora engagement in Africa's development, is capable of transforming Africa significantly, it has the disadvantage of undermining Africa's authentic development. Therefore, there is need to be cautious in mobilizing the diaspora for Africa's development. They should not be allowed to give conditions that are not favourable to Africa. Effective diaspora mobilization must be rooted in strong African institutions and value systems; participatory development frameworks, and policies that marry external contributions with internal capacity-building so as to achieve sustainable and equitable development outcome.

7 Way Forward in Africa/ African Diaspora Engagement

The following are expected to be done in order to maximize Africa diaspora engagement in Africa's development.

7.1 Strengthening Institutional Frameworks

Institutional frameworks are strategies meant for the actualization of certain objectives. There are strategies already created for diaspora relations. In order to pursue diaspora engagement in Africa's development robustly, ministries or agencies dedicated to coordinate diaspora networks should be given clear mandates and resources to streamline investment processes, and ensure accountability in development projects (Adebayo 2021). When this is done, the continent will experience increased remittances and knowledge transfer (World Bank 2022) which are things needed for Africa's transformation. For

instance (Mengistu 2020), noted that Ethiopia's Diaspora Directorate has enhanced investment participation through transparent policy mechanisms.

Again, strengthening institutional framework means carrying out reforms where necessary. This creates trust and encourage long-term partnerships between Diasporas and home countries. The African Union reiterates that strengthening governance structures not only mobilizes financial resources but also unlocks human capital essential for sustainable growth across Africa (African Union 2023).

7.2 Leveraging Technology and Digital Platforms

Knowledge transfer including technology and skill transfers is one of the strategies which can engender Africa's transformation faster and the tool for its achievement is the creation of digital platforms like the Africa Diaspora Network. All these enable knowledge exchange, mentorship, and investment (Adepoju 2022). African governments should key into current digital technologies like the use of online platforms and social media to connect diaspora members with development projects in Africa. The essence is to enhance communication, collaboration, contribution and real-time impact monitoring.

The World Bank believes that fintech innovations and crowd funding apps, are applications through which Diasporas contribute directly to local enterprises and social projects (World Bank 2023). Again, virtual knowledge hubs including virtual conferences and e-learning platforms enhance collaboration between experts abroad and institutions at home (UNDP 2021). Digital tools bridge physical distances and foster partnerships, promote innovation, and amplify Africa's global voice, thereby transforming remittances into sustainable development capital (OECD 2022).

African governments should also create portals for skills exchange, entrepreneurship training, and mentorship programs for interactive engagement between the young Africans back home and their countries' diaspora communities. When these initiatives are pursued vigorously with mandates to institutions created for them, Africa will begin to see the dividends of technology and digital platforms in her development efforts.

7.3 Facilitating Investment and Entrepreneurship

One of the ways through which the diaspora can foster development faster in Africa is by mobilizing diaspora communities to invest in entrepreneurship

(AUC 2024). The African Development Bank (AfDB), the African Union Commission (AUC), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) set an example by launching the ‘Streamlining Diaspora Engagement to Catalyze Private Investments and Entrepreneurship for Enhanced Resilience’. This is an initiative aimed at mobilizing the human and financial capital of African Diasporas across eight countries, explicitly targeting entrepreneurship and private-sector investment (AfDB *et al.* 2023). Creating programmes that enable pathways for Diasporas to invest, transfer skills, and partner with local actors is capable of accelerating sustainable growth, especially by empowering youth, women and rural communities (AfDB & AUC 2023).

By engaging diaspora effectively, they will not just remit money to Africa passively but they will be involved in entrepreneur-led ventures, which makes them provide both capital and expertise while reinforcing local ecosystems. Creating an enabling environment through policy frameworks, financial tools and diaspora networks is a key strategy to link diaspora investment and entrepreneurship to Africa’s broader development agenda (EAC 2023). In this direction, countries of Africa need to create and develop innovative financial instruments like diaspora bonds and investment funds tailored at diaspora investors to channel remittances and savings into productive sectors like agriculture, technology, infrastructure, and Small and Medium Enterprises, SMEs.

African governments should create the enabling business environments for their Diasporas by implementing tax reforms, waivers, grants, and business facilitation services to encourage diaspora entrepreneurs to invest or out rightly relocate their businesses back to Africa. These are ways of encouraging the diaspora to invest in Africa.

7.4 Skills Transfer and Capacity Building

One thing that orchestrates development in a nation is the quality of its manpower. Africa is blessed with a budding youth population. Incidentally most of these youth lack the necessary skills that make for productive growth. Africans in the diaspora possess these kinds of skills and they are gainfully employed, working in advanced countries contributing to their host counties’ economy. They, therefore represents a vast reservoir of expertise, innovation, and financial capital that can strengthen Africa’s human resource base (Adepoju 2021). Through planned and coordinated initiatives such as mentorship programs, academic exchanges, and digital collaboration platforms,

African diaspora professionals can contribute to enhancing local institutional capacities and fostering technological innovation (Moyo & Osei 2020).

Again, Africans in the diaspora can effectively transfer skills to those in Africa through virtual platforms. When this is done, there is promotion of knowledge circulation rather than brain drain. This creates a mutually beneficial relationship between African nations and their diaspora communities (World Bank 2022). African governments can invest in skills development by fostering partnerships with her diaspora. Governments of Africa must invest in skills development engendered through diaspora transfer and mentorship. Governments must deliberately make policies aimed at facilitating diaspora participation in national capacity-building strategies. Doing all the above will make African governments achieve inclusive growth, self-reliance and long-term socioeconomic transformation.

7.5 Harnessing Cultural Diplomacy and Advocacy

The diaspora can significantly contribute to the development of Africa through harnessing cultural diplomacy and advocacy. They can promote African heritage, values, and innovation abroad, Being Africa's ambassadors, diaspora communities are capable of reshaping global perceptions and attract partnerships for the continent's growth (Nye 2004). Through advocacy, they can attract investments, support educational exchanges, and foster international cooperation and linkages.

Moreover, cultural diplomacy uses soft power to enhance Africa's influence in trade and global policy making (Snow & Cull 2020). The diaspora can also use transnational networks to bridge cultural and economic divides and thus position Africa as a hub of creativity, opportunity, and resilience.

7.6 Promoting Inclusive and Gender-Sensitive Engagement

Gender disparity is a reality that has continued to rob Africa of the potential inputs of women in development. It is a situation whereby women are not factored into decision making because of the belief that they are meant to be seen and not to be heard but this has become otiose as globalization is concerned. Today, women count much in development discussions and are forces to reckon with in developed countries of the world. Women including African women are occupying very sensitive and important positions that are capable of transforming Africa significantly. Therefore, in trying to attract

development to Africa, inputs of both men and women must be taken into consideration. Both genders must be mobilized.

Therefore, African governments must harness the development potentials of her womenfolk by organizing those of them in the diaspora into a community of their own so as to tap from their different resources. By forming them into a community, they will feel important and will work hard to contribute their quotas as women to Africa's development.

Apart from gender sensitivity, another potential human resources that must be mobilized for the transformation of Africa is the youth who are the 'greater tomorrow'; they are vibrant and innovative than old men who are spent forces. When knowledge and skill transfers as well as mentorship are recommended for Africa's development, the youth are the people being referred to. The question that needs to be answered is: when the youth are excluded from the development processes and programmes, who will take over the mantle of leadership tomorrow? The answer is that Africa cannot neglect her greatest development asset.

Inclusivity encompassing gender sensitivity and youth mobilization among the African diaspora is a key to the acceleration of Africa's progress toward equity, prosperity, and resilience. When diaspora communities mobilize both male and females as well as youth, they mobilize resources and knowledge that empower women and marginalized groups, thereby driving innovation and socio-economic growth (UN Women 2023). Inclusivity must also be extended to development networks as this encourages equitable participation in decision-making and promotes diverse perspectives that shape Africa's transformation agendas holistically (Adeleke 2022).

To harness the full spectrum of talents and perspectives for Africa's transformation, African governments should be interested in mobilizing the totality of their Diaspora, both male and female, youth and the elderly. This is to say that they should ensure that diaspora engagement strategies are inclusive of women, youth, and marginalized groups.

7.7 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research

Efforts at Africa's development must be coordinated and must be intermittently monitored and evaluated so as to assess the extent of implementation of planned programmes and the success achieved so far, as well as challenges being encountered. For diaspora contribution to Africa's development to be successful, targets must be set, time frames determined and instruments for

implementation mapped out. All these steps must be monitored and evaluated.

There must also be follow-up action and continuous research for better results. This is because Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research (MER) are very important instruments in all facets of life. For advancement in whatever man does, he needs to monitor what he does, evaluate progress made so far and carry out more research on the way forward. The same is applicable for a coordinated Africa diaspora engagement in Africa's development. There is need for systematic monitoring of programs engagement of Diasporas in investments and knowledge transfers so as to track progress and ensure accountability (Moyo 2021). Evaluation helps in assessing the effectiveness of these initiatives in promoting sustainable growth and innovation.

The essence of research is to identify best practices and emerging opportunities which enables data-driven policy decisions (Adebayo & Smith 2022). A better way through which African governments and development partners can achieve accountability, transparency and also attract diaspora trust to amplify socio-economic transformation across sectors such as education, healthcare, and entrepreneurship, etc is by carrying out monitoring and evaluation of their efforts in knowledge transfer, mentorship, investment and entrepreneurship, etc. (Kane 2023).

Conclusion

The socio-economic and cultural development of the African continent is a collective responsibility of all members of the continent including those overseas. This paper explores the roles which Africans in diaspora play in Africa's transformation. Apart from financial support, they assist the continent in areas of investment and entrepreneurship; knowledge and skills transfer as well as in advocacy and innovations. They also link Africa to the world through fostering partnerships and collaborations which are intended to strengthen local institutions and drive sustainable growth. Through these measures, the diaspora also markets African potentials to the world. They represent Africa in international platforms and networks where they lend their voices to issues pertaining to Africa and also try to influence policies on Africa and shape narratives which polish the image of Africa against the distortions and misrepresentations of Africa's traducers.

The paper discovers some challenges to diaspora engagement in Africa's development but proffers improvement strategies. However, much as the diaspora can, and do play these laudable roles in Africa's development, they

cannot be moved to action without efficient and effective collaboration between African governments and the diaspora communities. The diaspora needs to be deliberately harnessed and mobilized in order to play these roles. African governments also need to create the enabling environments which can motivate the diaspora to play their roles effectively. Nevertheless, it is the finding of this research that while a few African governments have made efforts to mobilize their diaspora, many are yet to wake up from their existential slumber with regard to mobilizing their Diasporas for Africa's development.

Africa's development cannot be achieved by the efforts of only those resident in Africa, the African diaspora remains an indispensable force for progress, unity, and transformation and they need to be sufficiently mobilized for this all important role.

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