

## AFRICA'S EMIGRATION CRISIS

### Implications for Capacity Building

*From the African Community of Practice on Management for Development Results at the African Capacity Building Foundation*



Case Study  
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#### SYNOPSIS

Stronger country capacity to manage for results is critical in achieving country outcomes and the African transformation agendas 2030 and 2063. However, the brain drain harms the availability of skilled human resources in critical sectors such as education, health, and engineering. Africa is losing a significant proportion of its best asset needed for achieving these agendas. This paper aims to highlight the extent of Africa's brain drain and its impact on capacities for achieving country outcomes, and suggests some solutions.

**Key findings:** Not every African country suffers from a brain drain. Rwanda, for example, not only holds on to its brightest and best, but attracts international talent. The paper concludes that it is impossible to fully realize managing for results objectives, including the African transformation, without retaining and fully utilizing indigenous, skilled human resources. Yet growing activism of the Diaspora movement in Africa's development efforts and the growing political will in Africa to recognize the Diaspora's potential contribution gives some hope that the Diaspora is not totally lost to Africa. Given the poor political and economic climate and professional working conditions that persist in most African countries and the resultant high economic and professional risks involved, it is unrealistic to expect that accomplished Diasporas will relocate permanently to their countries.

**Main recommendations:** The paper recommends the following: African states should invest in programs that focus on a "brain gain" that does not involve permanent return; African states should promote systems and policies for virtual linkages and networks for the Diaspora; the African Capacity Building Foundation and its partners should develop a program to tap the Diaspora of its moral, intellectual, and social responsibility; and African states should be supported to embrace the Diasporas as key stakeholders.

#### Introduction

Strong country capacity to manage for results is critical in achieving national outcomes and the African transformation agendas. African states need adequate capacities to manage their development processes to achieve the outcomes they desire by defining and working in partnership with development agencies, civil society, and other stakeholders to design policies and programs to achieve those results. Countries need capacities to collect information on which to base this work, and statistical capacity, monitoring, and evaluation systems to generate the information. The development of capacity to manage in the public and

private sectors and community groups is critical for the development and transformation agendas in Africa.

That's the theory: in reality, the need to build, strengthen indigenous capacities, and maintain and use them is stymied by the migration of human capital—the brain drain (UNECA 2000; WEF 2014). Africa is losing its best and brightest doctors, engineers, professors, and other skilled professionals to the industrialized world (UNECA 2000).

This paper highlights the effects of the brain drain on Africa's socioeconomic development and efforts to institute a results culture, based on a desk review.

### **Defining the brain drain**

The brain drain is the process in which a country loses its most educated and talented workers to other countries through migration, including much of its academic and technological labor force to more favorable geographic, economic, or professional environments. The country they leave suffers economic hardships because those who remain might not have sufficient skills to continue developing the country. The movement usually occurs from developing to developed countries.<sup>1</sup>

The brain drain concerns many countries.<sup>2</sup> For example, in 2015, in an open letter in *Le Monde*, the heads of 10 successful French start-ups pleaded with Silicon Valley expatriates to return to a revived Paris full of new opportunities. China is another country from which hundreds of thousands of educated professionals have left for education and work experience. Some return but others do not (box 1).

Africa is no exception. According to Ehrhart et al. (2014), African migrant numbers doubled between 1980 and 2010 to 30.6 million—around 3 percent of the continent's population. Around half stay in Africa, with Côte d'Ivoire, South Africa, and Burkina Faso the most popular destinations. However, the number of African migrants who stay in Africa decreased steadily from 59 percent in 1980 to 51 percent in 2010. There is growing movement of North African migrants to the Middle East and to Europe.

#### **Box 1: Snapshot of statistics on emigration of skilled Africans to industrialized countries**

- Since 1990, Africa has been losing 20,000 professionals annually.
- Over 300,000 professionals reside outside Africa.
- Ethiopia lost 75 percent of its skilled workforce between 1980 and 1991.
- It costs US\$40,000 to train a doctor in Kenya and US\$15,000 to fund a university student.
- 35 percent of total overseas development assistance to Africa is spent on expatriate professionals.
- There are currently over 300,000 highly qualified Africans in the Diaspora, 30,000 of whom have PhDs.
- Africa spends US\$4 billion a year (35 percent of total official development aid to the continent) to employ some 100,000 Western experts performing functions generically described as technical assistance. For example, 90 percent of private firms in Gabon are managed by expatriates.

Source: International Organization for Migration, and UNECA estimates.

### **Causes of Africa's brain drain**

Qualifications in most African countries are not well remunerated, feeding into most qualified people's decisions to leave their country. Burundi has the highest rate of brain drain in the continent (table 2), which can be linked to the fact that Burundi's political crisis has seen an absence of the voice of its intellectuals. The political debate in the country has been dominated by regime loyalists and militant opponents, with neutral voices such as those of independent media muzzled.<sup>3</sup>

Research reports such as UNECA (2000), and IOM (2015) point to the main causes of the brain drain in Africa as inadequate jobs; poor career progression prospects; wars, political instability, and insecurity; unfavorable working environments; limited scope

<sup>1</sup> <http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-brain-drain-in-economics-definition-causes-effects-examples.html> (accessed March 20, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> <http://qz.com/599140/how-severe-is-africas-brain-drain/> (accessed March 20, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> <http://mgafrica.com/article/2015-08-28-brain-drain-burundi-the-country-most-unable-to-retain-its-top-talent-rwanda-kenya-star-and-jammehs-gambia-surprises>.

for fulfillment of aspirations and recognition; infrastructure deficiencies; lack of property rights and weak incentive systems; and marginalization and unequal treatment in socioeconomic and political spheres.

The brain drain also has a long historical explanation that dates back to the slave trade era. Africa was among the earliest civilizations in the world and participated in the discovery of techniques such as iron smelting to make various tools. The retrogression of the continent and the search for greener pastures by its citizens has been a result of the succumbing of African leaders to the trickery of other countries including those in the West that invaded the region as well as the problems of governance in contemporary Africa (Chimanikire 2005).

The factors that cause the brain drain can be categorized as push and pull factors (table 1).

**Table 1: Push and pull factors**

Push factors	Pull factors
Social unrest, political conflicts, and wars	Higher wages and income
Bad policies, such as structural adjustment programs	Higher standard of living
Unsatisfactory living conditions, lack of transport, housing, and so on	Better working conditions
Environmental problems	Better job and career opportunities and professional development
Under-utilization of qualified personnel; lack of satisfactory working conditions; low prospects for professional development	Substantial funds for research, advanced technology, modern facilities
Lack of research and other facilities,	Experienced support staff
	Political stability
	Modern educational system

including support staff; inadequacy of research funds, lack of professional equipment and tools	Prestige of foreign training
Low and eroding wages and salaries	Meritocracy, transparency
Declining quality of educational system	Intellectual freedom
Discrimination in appointments and promotions	
Lack of freedom	

Source: Chimanikire (2005); and <http://www.aracorporation.org/files/factsandfigures.pdf>.

***The extent of Africa’s brain drain***

With over 50 percent of the African population under the age of 30, there is a pressing need to use and retain African skills. A United Nations report (UN and OECD 2013) shows that one in nine Africans with a tertiary education—comprising 2.9 million people—were living in developed countries, for 50 percent growth in the past 10 years, a faster rate than any other region. This crisis is most clearly shown in the medical field. The recent Ebola crisis highlighted the continent’s doctor shortages. In 1973, there were 7.76 doctors per 100,000 people in Liberia. This dropped to 1.37 doctors in 2008. In East Africa, Uganda has fewer than 5,000 doctors and 30,000 nurses for a population topping 35 million people (World Health Organization data)<sup>4</sup>. Kenyan doctors migrate to the United States, United Kingdom, and South Africa. Some 30–40 percent of the estimated 600 doctors who graduate in Kenya annually leave after completing their internship. South Africa is considered as a leading destination (Firsing 2016). In the Kenyan province of Lamu, five of their doctors resigned in early 2015, leaving just one doctor for 100,000 citizens. Former South Africa president Thabo Mbeki described Africa’s brain drain as “frightening” in 2015. He seems right (tables 2 and 3).

<sup>4</sup> <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.A1444>

**Table 2: Status of Africa's brain drain, 2014/2015—  
The worst performers**

1. Burundi	1.9
2. Algeria	2.3
3. Mauritania	2.3
4. Chad	2.4
5. Guinea	2.5
6. Sierra Leone	2.5
7. Libya	2.7
8. Zimbabwe	2.7
9. Swaziland	2.8
10. Uganda	2.8
11. Egypt	2.9
12. Madagascar	2.9
13. Burkina Faso	3.0
14. Cameroon	3.0
15. Tanzania	3.0
16. Tunisia	3.0
17. Ethiopia	3.1
18. Nigeria	3.1
19. Seychelles	3.1

Source: WEF 2014.

Note: A scale of 1 to 7: 1 means the best and brightest leave for opportunities in other countries; 7 means they stay.

**Table 3: Status of Africa's brain drain, 2014/2015—  
The best performers**

1. Rwanda	4.6
2. Seychelles	4.0
3. Côte d'Ivoire	3.9
4. Gambia	3.9
5. Mauritius	3.9
6. Morocco	3.9
7. South Africa	3.9
8. Zambia	3.9
9. Angola	3.8
10. Nigeria	3.8
11. Tunisia	3.8
12. Botswana	3.7
13. Kenya	3.7
14. Senegal	3.7
15. Gabon	3.6
16. Lesotho	3.6
17. Mozambique	3.6
18. Cape Verde	3.5
19. Malawi	3.5
20. Ghana	3.4
21. Namibia	3.4
22. Mali	3.3
23. Sierra Leone	3.3
24. Tanzania	3.3
25. Swaziland	3.2

Source: WEF 2014.

Note: A scale of 1 to 7: 1 means the best and brightest leave for opportunities in other countries; 7 means they stay.

According to United States Census bureau reports, the African-born population in the United States doubled every decade after 1970. These migrants are also more educated than those from other continents (41 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher compared with 28 percent overall). During the last 40 years, Africans have increased from about 80,000 in 1970 to about 1.6 million—with the largest increase from 2000 to 2008–2012—to account for 4 percent of the United States foreign-born population. Nigeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, and Ghana accounted for 41 percent of the Africa-born total.

The United States is the most popular destination for students from Sub-Saharan Africa. A report from the New York-based Institute of International Education concludes that ambitious African youth see the United States having better higher education and access to numerous scholarships for talented students. In 2014, there were 31,113 students from Sub-Saharan Africa, or 4 percent of the 886,052 international students in the country. The top Sub-Saharan African countries of origin are Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, Cameroon, and Ethiopia. The United Kingdom was second, and was the first choice of 6 percent of Nigerian and 4 percent of South African students, and the most popular second choice for students from Sub-Saharan Africa generally.

## Effects of migration

### Negative

A country's true strength is its people. But the continent continues to suffer a brain drain where the highly educated and skilled leave for greener pastures (Firsing 2016). The negative impacts include the reduction of the already low quantity of skilled human resources for development; lower numbers of dynamic and innovative people, whether entrepreneurs or academics; increased dependence on foreign technical assistance; slower transfer of technology; and a wider gap between African and

industrialized countries. They also include lower scientific output and money lost in income tax revenues and potential contributions to the economy (World Bank 2015).

### **Positive**

Positive outcomes are few. They include the contribution of new skills when migrants return to their countries of origin, and remittances. Best estimates suggest that Africans working abroad send home some US\$45 billion a year. But remittances do not make up for the social costs and adverse economic effects. Moreover, remittances in Africa are not structured or fed into development projects. Most of them end up in individual or family welfare expenditure that does not transform societies. And remittances usually reach already well-to-do families (those that managed to send their children abroad), distorting the welfare system.

Remittances to Africa reached US\$32.9 billion in 2014, a 2.2 percent increase over 2013 (World Bank 2015b). Nigeria accounted for two-thirds of this flow, equivalent to a third of its imports in 2013. Remittances also play a key part in imports to Uganda, Rwanda, Guinea, Seychelles, and South Africa, ranging from 18 percent in Uganda to 1 percent in South Africa. Others such as Lesotho, Liberia, and the Gambia are heavily dependent on remittances, equivalent to 20 percent of GDP (World Bank 2015).

African expatriates are also believed to increase African exports. One additional migrant creates around US\$2,100 a year in additional exports for her or his country of origin (World Bank 2015b). The findings highlight the ability of African migrants to help overcome some of the main barriers to African trade, namely, the weakness of institutions, information costs, cultural differences, and lack of trust. But not every African country suffers a brain drain (see table 3).

## **Efforts to stem the brain drain**

Efforts to stem the brain drain focusing on repatriation strategies have been discouraging. Repatriation will not work as long as African governments fail to address the push and pull factors. Below are some pilot programs, which had mixed outcomes.

### ***The Diaspora option***

Several past attempts include the retention and return of skilled migrants, though with scant success. The Diaspora option, which encourages highly skilled expatriates to contribute their experience to the development of their country without necessarily physically relocating, emerged in the early 1990s as a more realistic strategy to alleviate the consequences of the brain drain.

### ***Initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development and civil society organizations***

There is evidence of Africans, especially the younger generation studying at foreign universities, wanting to return. Closeness to their families is a key factor. However, they also weigh the risks against the rewards. African governments and initiatives run by various nongovernmental organizations are promoting the rewards and calling on Africans to return. This includes the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the Homecoming Revolution.

### ***The Homecoming Revolution***

The Homecoming Revolution, which defines itself as a "brain gain company for Africa," previously focused its efforts on South Africans but now targets expatriates from Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, and Kenya. The company states that 359,000 South Africans have returned home in the last five years;<sup>5</sup> and for every skilled person who returns to South Africa, nine new jobs are created in the formal and informal sectors. Part of the campaign involves helping

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.globalpost.com/article/6632967/2015/08/19/africa-exporting-brains-how-continent-trying-lure-its-best-and-brightest> (accessed March 20, 2016).

Africans move back to Africa, through efforts such as matchmaking events with prospective employers and advice on housing and readjustment. The biggest concern about returning, particularly to South Africa, is fear for one's safety, given the country's high rate of violent crime.

## Assessment and outcomes

### ***The brain drain affects Africa's capacity building***

Virtual participation could be a better solution to Africa's brain drain, that is, participation in nation-building without physical relocation. It also shows promise as a means to engage the African Diaspora in development efforts. Mercy Brown of the University of Cape Town notes that virtual participation "... sees the brain drain not as a loss but a potential gain... Highly skilled expatriates are seen as a pool of potentially useful human resources for the country of origin... the challenge is to mobilize these brains." Questions remain, however. Will virtual participation work in a continent where government–Diaspora relations are adversarial and information technology almost non-existent and where development needs are complex and require a sustained commitment?

### ***The cost of the brain drain is huge in multiple fields***

*Financial:* The brain drain in Africa has financial, institutional, and societal costs. African countries receive little return for their investment in higher education since too many graduates leave or fail to return at the end of their studies. In light of a dwindling professional sector, African institutions are increasingly dependent on foreign expertise.

*Human resources for health:* The departure of health professionals has eroded the ability of medical and social services in several Sub-Saharan African countries to deliver even basic health and social needs. Thirty-eight of the 47 Sub-Saharan African countries fall short of the minimum World Health Organization standard of 20 physicians per 100,000 people (Tebeje 2005).

*Widening gap in science and technology:* The continuous outflow of skilled labor contributes to a widening gap in science and technology between Africa and other continents. Africa's share of global scientific output has fallen from 0.5 in the mid-1980s to 0.3 percent in the mid-1990s. *There are more African scientists and engineers in the United States than in the whole of Africa* (Tebeje 2005).

*Threats to the economic and political systems:* The emigration of professionals from Africa endangers the economic and political systems in several African countries. As its middle class crumbles and its contributions to the tax system, employment, and civil society disappear, Africa risks becoming home to growing numbers of poor people.

### ***There is hope: Efforts undertaken to stem the brain drain***

*The Diaspora as stakeholder:* Recent developments in government–Diaspora relations show positive signs of change. A study, "Semantics Aside: The Role of the African Diaspora in Africa's Capacity Building Efforts," revealed emerging Diaspora efforts to assume a more active role in Africa's development. The study, conducted by the Association for Higher Education and Development, a Diaspora group based in Canada, supported by the International Development Research Centre, examined the potential of virtual participation to facilitate an effective and sustained Diaspora commitment to Africa's development efforts. The study concluded that virtual participation has tremendous potential to channel the untapped intellectual and material input from the African Diaspora. Moreover, it recorded a growing awareness among the African Diaspora of its moral, intellectual, and social responsibility to contribute to Africa's development efforts.

Furthermore, there are some positive signs that Africa has shown a growing will to reconcile with the African Diaspora. Both the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the African Union (AU) have formally recognized the African Diaspora as a key player in the development agenda of the

continent. In 2003, the AU amended its Charter to encourage the full participation of the African Diaspora as an important part of the continent. The AU also decided to make the Diaspora the sixth region of the AU.

*Virtual linkages:* Virtual linkages are independent, non-political, and non-profit networks facilitating skill transfer and capacity building. These networks mobilize skilled Diaspora members' expertise for the development process in their countries of origin. To date, 41 virtual networks in 30 different countries have been identified. Six of these are African, including the South African Network of Skills Abroad with members in 68 countries. Individuals of the Diaspora also contribute through virtual networks, as visiting scholars, by investing in companies and assisting in joint ventures between hosts and sending countries.

*Expatriate knowledge networks:* The early 1990s saw a surge in efforts to have African expatriates meaningfully contribute to the continent's development. These efforts included identifying expatriate knowledge networks across the world. About 41 such networks have been reported to date, with six linked to countries in Africa, including the Association of Kenyans Abroad, the Moroccan Association of Researchers and Scholars Abroad, the Association of Nigerians Abroad, the South African Network of Skills Abroad, and the Tunisian Scientific Consortium.<sup>6</sup>

*Continental and national efforts:* The New Partnership for Africa's Development had called "for the establishment of a reliable, continental database to determine the magnitude of the problem of brain drain and promote collaboration between Africans abroad and those at home." The government of Sierra Leone established a Diaspora Directorate in 2008 in the Office of the President to coordinate efforts aimed at increasing the participation of skilled Sierra Leoneans abroad in the development and transformation process of the country. Relevant databases have been developed in this direction and

a series of follow ups abroad undertaken. There has been increased participation of these individuals in the public service and political engagements including parliament. Special incentives are provided in some cases to attract them back home. These instruments have been articulated in the country's poverty reduction strategy papers. In the current paper, the government of Sierra Leone introduced the issuance of Diaspora bonds to tap into loanable resources and assets of Sierra Leoneans abroad to invest in priority areas of the economy.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion and recommendations

It is impossible to manage for country outcomes and African transformations without retaining and using trained and skilled human resources. Still, the emerging Diaspora movement to become more active in Africa's development efforts, growing political will in Africa to recognize the Diaspora's potential contribution, and the possibilities created by information technology raise some hope that the African Diaspora is not totally lost to the continent.

Given the unattractive political and economic climate, poor professional working conditions that persist in most African countries, and the resultant high economic and professional risks involved, it is unrealistic to expect that the Diaspora will relocate permanently in their countries of origin. The paper recommends the following:

- African states should invest in programs that focus on brain gain that does not involve permanent return. Successful initiatives will help to foster better governance and efficient resource management in critical areas such as education, health, and infrastructure.
- African states should promote systems and policies for virtual linkages and networks for participation of the Diaspora in Africa development, as it has tremendous

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.aracorporation.org/files/factsandfigures.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Government of Sierra Leone (2013: 154).

potential to channel its untapped intellectual and material input.

- The African Capacity Building Foundation and its partners should create a program to tap the growing awareness among the Diaspora of its moral, intellectual, and social responsibility to contribute to Africa's development efforts.
- African governments should invest in centers of excellence. These can help influence the development and implementation of policies aimed at improving the living and working conditions of African professionals at home. They need to invest more in universities and research centers, and to create educational infrastructure that facilitates world-class research.
- African states should provide financial support to young scientists and entrepreneurs who will conduct research that meets their home countries' development priorities. This requires them to elevate local institutions to the status of centers of excellence and to ensure that collaborative research is undertaken.
- Governments should recognize, promote, and fully use the African Diaspora. Policy and resource commitments will be required from key stakeholders, including African governments, host countries, and international organizations.
- African states should use information technology to leverage the Diaspora's assets.
- African governments should enhance exchange programs. It is crucial that better use is made of the Diaspora's enormous potential. One such example would be to use skilled expatriates more to train African nationals.
- African states should strengthen their educational systems to reduce parents' desire to send their children abroad for education.
- Governments should improve job opportunities and fairness in their distribution and accessibility. This will ensure that qualified individuals, irrespective of gender, creed, ethnic identity, culture, regional origin, and other factors, can have equal opportunities.
- African states should improve their governance systems, expand and uphold property rights, and reinforce democratic values to cement peace and stability necessary for the private sector to thrive. This is critical for creating jobs for all, especially youth.
- The African Capacity Building Foundation and partners should develop a special program of advocacy on the reversal of brain drain through engagement with African leadership and Regional Economic Communities within the framework of pursuing Goal 17 of the SDGs and putting into action the Addis Ababa Agenda Action on Development Financing, as well as pursuing AU Agenda 2063.
- It is critical for African regional capacity building institutions to link up with the 41 expatriate knowledge networks across the world with connection to African countries in pursuit of the agenda of reversing the brain drain.
- Pursue a campaign of change of mindsets and attitudes in those Africans living abroad to imbibe a high sense of national and ancestral pride, civic duty for the country of origin, and self-belief to serve the home country. This can be done by African civil society organizations involved in issues related to brain drain.



- The Western countries are called upon to team up with African countries in pursuit of a common and integrated strategy to reverse the African brain drain.
- The African Capacity Building Foundation and regional institutions should conduct a study to learn from Rwanda, Kenya, South Africa, the Gambia, and others on what these countries are doing differently to retain their top talent.

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