



The EU, the African Diaspora in Europe, and its Impact on Democracy Building in Africa

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Abstract

Democracy-building in Africa through the mediation of the African diaspora in Europe is not a priority on the agenda of the European Union (EU). Indeed, it has failed even to gain the political attention of those EU member states where diaspora organizations and institutions can be actively mobilized in democracy-building efforts in Africa. This is primarily because the role that African diasporas play in democracy-building on the continent is an area which has not yet been sufficiently studied. The lack of a solid knowledge base on the subject hinders the EU and its member states from formulating appropriate policies that can be translated into feasible strategic interventions and realizable actions.

The human resources and strategic potential of the African diaspora in Europe have not been sufficiently harnessed to promote and advance effective, responsible, transparent, accountable and democratic systems of governance in Africa. Over the past five years, the aspect that has received the most policy attention from the EU and its member states has been the size and impact of the financial remittances that the diasporas transfer to their respective homelands. However, the African diasporas also transfer non-financial values which influence the development of their homelands, values that could make a significant contribution to improving the situation on the continent.

The Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership presents an opportunity for the EU, its member states and their subsidiary development circles to align themselves with the African diaspora. The successful execution of the programme will require a broad spectrum of resourceful actors and stakeholders in development cooperation circles and beyond, both in Africa and in Europe. There are great advantages to working with the African diaspora as potential human agents to translate the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership policy priorities into real outcomes. Diasporas can contribute to democratic governance in much the same way that they currently contribute to economic welfare and development in their home countries. They can do so by making their knowledge, professional experience and expertise available to strengthen the capacity of political institutions in Africa. For the diaspora, democratic governance is critical in creating

an enabling environment in the homelands. Creating an enabling environment in the home countries is, in effect, a precondition for sustainable development in Africa, and for engaging the diasporas in the overall development of their respective home countries.

Summary of Recommendations

In order to foster democracy-building programmes in Africa using the African diaspora expertise, the EU should:

- Widen development circles in Europe by incorporating the diasporas as active actors in democratization initiatives and processes in a more structured and formal manner.
- Realize that the African diaspora in Europe occupy a unique bridge-building position in which it can play a potential role to promote democratic governance in Africa.
- Partner with the diaspora to implement certain priority areas in the Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, notably democratic governance and human rights, migration, mobility and development.
- Generate knowledge that enhances the EU's understanding of how the long-distance activities undertaken by the diasporas contribute to the promotion of viable governance and democratic political life in their countries of origin.
- Establish migration and development funds to support initiatives such as good governance, democratization, human rights and brain-gain projects initiated by diaspora organizations.

1. Context

The policy of building sustainable democracy in Africa is one of the European Union's (EU) objectives in contemporary development cooperation relations. The EU adopted this policy instrument to rekindle a process to integrate the continent into the world economy (European Commission 2006).

Other related priority policy areas include promoting good governance, rule of law, human rights protection and fostering peace and security, all regarded as preconditions for social stability, economic growth and sustainable development. Capacity building in these priority policy areas is what principally defines the EU's support to Africa. This commitment was reiterated in the Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership and the Action Plan adopted in Lisbon on 8-9 December 2007 (African Union & European Union 2007).

The EU and its member states translate these policy principles into practice by supporting different development circles within the development cooperation sector. These development circles include international organizations, national and local government institutions, mainstream development agencies and civil society entities. However, the African diaspora institutions and organizations in the EU member states have a minimal presence in development circles because they are not seen as 'mainstream'

development agents. Some exceptions exist, particularly in the area of community development projects, which fall within the framework of 'co-development' schemes by a few member states, notably, France, Italy and Spain. The focus however is on the purely material development that the diasporas mediate and not on the non-economic aspects such promoting democratic life in their home countries. Generally speaking, diasporas are less active in the traditional development cooperation sector, which is the domain of governments. Diasporas are active in the migration and development field where they play a leading role. Therefore, the challenge that the EU and its member states have to address is how to mainstream migration and development into the traditional development cooperation sector. Merging these two parallel development processes would make it possible to capitalize the potential of the diasporas not only in the area of remittances and small-scale co-development community-oriented projects geared towards poverty reduction, but also in other areas such as the promotion of democracy in Africa where they are in a position to play a positive role.

The challenge that the EU and its member states have to address is how to mainstream migration and development into the traditional cooperation sector. Merging these two parallel processes would capitalize the potential of the diaspora to promote democracy in Africa.

2. The Nexus between Migration and Development

The nexus between migration and development emerged as a distinct policy field in the past few years. It has also manifested itself as a new and growing development cooperation sector which is largely driven by the diaspora. It is the result of the growing economic and human resources potential of the diaspora communities that needs to be tapped in order to benefit the overall development of their countries of origin.

Until recently, migration and development has been a terrain where diaspora groups and organizations have operated in an informal and exclusive manner. Thanks to inexpensive transportation and rapid communication, diasporas are able to exert far greater influence on their homelands than ever before. This advantage enables diaspora communities to build up vast transnational networks (criss-crossing countries and continents) linking globalization to the local conditions of their respective countries of origin. Likewise, it enables diaspora communities to build up intersecting social, economic and political bridges that link their new places of residence with their original homelands. These resources equip the African diasporas in Europe to play a significant role in promoting peace, democratization and social stability in their respective countries of origin.

Within the migration and development sector, African diaspora institutions, organizations and individuals transfer all kinds of values, not just financial remittances, from Europe to Africa. Diaspora communities can transfer information, innovative ideas, intellectual capacities, technological skills, innovative business and trade practices, peace-building mechanisms, and democratic political habits and practices to Africa. Eventually, these non-financial flows may have more profound impacts on the attitudes of society regarding the perception of freedom, tolerance of differences, human rights issues, governance and political practices in the homelands.

3. Dimensions of the Migration and Development Field

The migration and development field has many different aspects. Over the past five years, the aspect that has received most of the policy attention from the EU and its member

states has been the size and impact of the financial remittances that diasporas transfer to their respective homelands. This issue dominates the development cooperation debates between Europe and Africa. The study on the remittance behavior dictates the research agenda commissioned by the EU and most of its member states within the field of migration and development. The countless publications and reports that have been produced and numerous workshops, expert meetings and conferences organized on the topic is a clear testimony to this.

However, most remittance from the rich world to developing countries goes to Latin America and the Caribbean, followed by East and South Asia. Sub-Saharan Africa receives only 1.5 per cent of remittance flows (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2004). This figure illustrates the limited financial resources that the African diaspora collectively generate in comparison with the huge sums that other diasporas send home. It can thus be concluded that the meagre remittances transferred

by the African diaspora would not have a substantial impact on the overall economic development in Africa. This reality validates the need to study and investigate other values that the African diaspora in Europe transfer that could make a difference to the situation in their respective countries of origin, or, for that matter, to the continent as a whole.

In the long run, the influence and impact of the social capital that the diaspora transfers will be more enduring than that of its financial remittances. The prime reason is that in many African countries, the lack of development and economic growth is not due to the absence of exploitable resources, but is a consequence of weak social and political institutions—Liberia and Sierra Leone represent obvious cases. The active participation of an experienced and highly qualified diaspora to build democracy in the homelands could indeed

contribute to political transformation on the ground. The dilemma is that Western donors insist that African governments put in place a democratic system of governance. However, this task can never be simple, even where there is the political will, as long as a large part of the professional class who would have been in a position to design good policies and bring about social change is absent from the continent.

For example, in some countries in Africa such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Mozambique, more than 50 per cent of the trained professionals have migrated and remain abroad. The educated class with the skills, professional capacity and experience to draft appropriate constitutions, identify policy priorities for social, economic and political reconstruction, and formulate strategies for implementation is not present. Similarly, the educated class that could have influenced public opinion through debates, articles and cultural input aimed at nurturing and inculcating democratic political habits in the minds of political society and thereby help to gradually neutralize the prevailing authoritarian tendencies in politics is also largely absent. Thus, the absence of this critical educated middle class from the domestic theatre in many African countries removes the internal pressure that is the main force for change in any society. This important aspect is ignored by donor countries as they formulate policies to promote good governance in Africa. A policy-oriented analysis of the non-financial transfers for which the diasporas are responsible is urgently required. This analysis is also needed in

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order to improve understanding of the other aspects of the migration and development field. The availability of sound policy analysis will enable the EU and its member states to formulate policy instruments to galvanize the African diasporas in Europe to invest their social capital in democracy building and in strengthening governing institutions and policy-making apparatus in their respective homelands.

4. African Governments' Changing Attitude towards the Diaspora

Over the past five years there has been a significant change in African governments' perception of their overseas diasporas. In the previous three decades, diasporas had been regarded as enemies of the government; this is no longer the case. Now, diasporas are increasingly seen as positive actors: as countrymen and women abroad who can contribute to development efforts in their homelands. As a result, old animosities have mostly been buried and a new era of comradeship has taken their place. In practical terms, this has meant that many African governments have initiated diaspora-friendly policies. For instance, there are now 15 African countries that have set up diaspora-related institutions and ministries to deal professionally with diaspora-led development-related issues. Examples include Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda, among others. In addition, the African Union Commission has created the African Citizens Directorate to deal with overarching issues in the relationship between overseas diasporas and homeland governments. This step is a precondition for engaging the diasporas in the overall development of their respective home countries of origin.

The African governments' changing attitude towards their diasporas is due to the recognition of the diasporas' potential for contributing to the overall development of the continent. In recent years, diasporas have strategically positioned themselves as critical development actors in development cooperation relations between Europe and Africa. This has been the key factor for international institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations (UN) to acknowledge diaspora communities as the 'fourth development aid actors', along with international organizations, governments and mainstream development agencies.

The positive rapprochement between the homeland governments and the diasporas during the past five years has transformed the context of the old political landscape for the better. It has opened up a window of opportunity for effective cooperation between the two entities. There is now a growing realization among the African diasporas in the West that they have a responsibility to do something for the continent they have left physically but not emotionally. It is this emotional attachment that prompts the diasporas to maintain ties with their countries of origin which in turn is translated into obligations and thereby into concrete commitments, actions and activities. Diasporas feel that they are now in a strategic position to facilitate the process of transnational activities and networks and to act as development bridge-builders between the West and Africa. For instance, they hold the view that this strategic position enables them to forge innovative patterns of 'globalisation from below' in which individual and group players rather than mega-corporations benefit and make use of the opportunities offered by globalization (Mohan & Zack-Williams 2002).

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The limited results of the official donor development aid to Africa over the past 40 years is compelling the diaspora to become part of the development circles in Western countries so as to produce better results in the future. African diasporas are ready and willing to participate in the positive changes they wish to see in their respective countries (Chikezie 2002; Mohamoud 2003).

5. The Diaspora's Potential to Build Democracy in Africa

Scattered across different economic and power centres around the globe, the African diaspora occupies an indispensable strategic position that links the developed North with Africa. The African diaspora currently living in EU countries is estimated to be around 3.3 million, of whom 1 million are from sub-Saharan Africa (Eurostat 2008). The number of the African diaspora is even greater when those living in other European countries are taken into account. In this regard, the diaspora is Africa's greatest offshore asset because of the potential of its considerable human and financial capital.

The proactive participation of the European-based African diaspora in democracy building is indispensable. Diasporas are potential actors that can add value to the efforts undertaken by other players involved in the promotion of democratization processes. Consider these advantages: first, diasporas understand local contexts in their respective homelands much better than other external actors. External actors, such as international organizations and donor agencies, need a considerable amount of time in order to understand the socio-cultural and historical complexities in any local context. For this reason, the inclusion of diasporas in democracy-building initiatives can help resolve this critical challenge and effectively bridge the gap. So far, the considerable potential of the African diaspora has been insufficiently harnessed for the promotion of democratic governance in Africa. Second, due to its exposure to democratic political transactions and practices, the African diaspora is able to introduce new ways of dealing with political challenges in the homelands, which can contribute to widening the horizon and worldview of local political elites. The third advantage is that the African diaspora located in Europe is in a better position to mobilize substantial financial resources, extensive transnational networks, powerful international forces, and political connections that span the globe. Finally, some of the African diaspora organizations in different EU countries are now involved in various long-distance activities geared towards promoting democratization processes in their respective homelands. This was

not the case some years back when democracy building had yet to become a priority.

There is a need for a policy instrument that stimulates African diaspora organizations and associations to redouble their efforts in promoting democratic governance on the continent.

An estimated 3.3 million Africans live in EU countries. The considerable potential of the African diaspora has been insufficiently harnessed for the promotion of democratic governance in Africa.

6. Limited Impact of the Diaspora's Efforts in Democracy Building in Africa

The African diasporas in Europe have long been active contributors in promoting democratization processes in Africa, but the impact of their efforts has been limited. The chief reason is that the African diasporas have been pushing isolated democratization

processes in Africa since their initiatives rarely received support from development circles in Europe. More strikingly, the initiatives undertaken by the diaspora were not structurally integrated into the existing democratization processes implemented by mainstream donor development agencies, EU governments and institutions, international and regional organizations and UN bodies.

Generally, the activities of the African diasporas in their respective homelands are concentrated in the area of civil society. For example, through civic-oriented activities, diaspora organizations help enhance the capacities and organizational structures of civil society networks and promote community-oriented development, social emancipation, empowerment, grassroots political participation, and so forth. The impact of this civic-oriented diaspora involvement in domestic development can be better observed at the sub-national, local and village level rather than national levels. The transformative effect of these civic-oriented activities on social and political structures seems not yet to be recognized by the EU. It is, however, a process which if effectively supported can nurture a democratic governance culture and impress democratic political habits in the minds of political society on the continent.

Although the impact has been limited, the African diasporas in Europe have provided several forms of support to democracy building in Africa. First, the African diasporas have played a role in forming pressure groups devoted to influencing political developments in their respective homelands. In this regard, they actively promote, through their transnational networks, radical political change geared to reshaping the political thinking and expectations of the people on the continent. They demand democratic and well-functioning public institutions that are accountable to the people, transparent, and respect freedom of expression. However, this long-distance engagement in the political processes in the homelands has not always been a success. Second, the African diasporas have helped positive political forces at home make contact with important and powerful political networks abroad. For example, some individuals are members of established political parties in the host country. This strategic position enables them to facilitate valuable networks for the political parties in the homeland through the established political parties with which they are affiliated in the EU countries. Third, the African diasporas have played an important role in the area of capacity building by making their professional skills and expertise available to the government and to political parties in their respective home countries. A concrete case is the Eritrean diaspora, which made its expertise available for drafting the country's first constitution after its separation from Ethiopia in 1993. In turn, the diaspora was given voting rights. The Eritrean diaspora has also been successful to a certain extent in influencing the political processes at the sub-national and local levels. At these lower levels, there are sufficient political, societal and institutional spaces where diasporas can play a tangible role in the advancement of the democratization processes in the homelands.

Generally, the African diasporas' influence is limited at most national levels because of the prevailing power politics that the ruling elites exercise as a zero-sum game. It is at this higher level where the EU and its member states can play a complementary role in influencing the political processes.

7. EU Policies in Partnering Diasporas on Democracy Building in Africa

Democracy building in Africa, through the mediation of the African diaspora in Europe, is not a priority for the EU. Nor has the issue gained the political attention of EU member states where diaspora organizations and institutions can be mobilized in the efforts of democracy building in Africa. One explanation is that the EU and its member states operate within the policy framework prescribed by the principles of the traditional development cooperation relations. The traditional development aid framework was instituted in the 1950s. Development aid (also *development assistance* or *technical assistance*) is traditionally given by rich donor countries in Europe and elsewhere to support the economic, social and political development of developing countries. The implementation of development aid has been the responsibility of the donor countries and their subsidiary agencies, be they government or development agencies. The African diasporas have not been part of that development circle and are not involved in the implementation of development aid projects in their countries of origin. There are two reasons for this. The first reason is the recent emergence of huge numbers of African diaspora communities in Europe. The second reason is that in contrast to the EU and its member states, the African diasporas operate within the migration and development sector, or, diaspora-driven development assistance. Diasporas created this sector to support the overall development of their countries of origin.

In comparison with the decades-old, donor-driven development cooperation model, the migration and development sector has a recent origin. The sector blossomed in the late 1990s due to the huge increase of the diaspora population in rich Western countries. Since 2003, the sector has captured the attention of policy makers both at the EU and in member states. Within the remittances framework, the EU and its member states have supported a number of co-development plans that African diaspora organizations have implemented in their countries of origin. Yet, most of the co-development actions implemented thus far were undertaken within the economic realm and not within the domain of political institutions and democratic governance. The objective was poverty reduction and improving livelihoods in the receiving communities. Therefore, there was no interest from the EU beyond the remittances aspect in the field of migration and development. The exception is the current discussion regarding circular migration and related issues such as the 'Blue Card', which is devised to attract highly skilled immigrants from outside of Europe. In short, the EU and its member states have not developed policies to mobilize the diaspora to promote democratic political cultures in Africa.

Three main reasons explain this. The first is the limited understanding of the concept of development within the context of migration and development. The notion of development within this framework is narrowly viewed as remittance transfers and community-oriented projects that the diaspora implement on the ground. However, as already noted, financial remittance is but one of the values that the diasporas transfer to the homelands. In this regard, there is a need to broaden the conceptual understanding of what is meant by development in the context of migration and development.

In this field, development should be conceptualized so as to encompass economic, social, and transnational networks and political dimensions, with which diasporas interact vis-à-vis the domestic situation in the homeland. In addition, the contribution of diaspora

institutions, organizations and individuals to peace building, improving human rights conditions, advancing institutional knowledge, upgrading and strengthening governance institutions, deepening democratization processes and facilitating knowledge transfer (brain gain) should all be considered to be forms of development. There is an urgent need to examine the development potential beyond remittances of the huge African diaspora resident in Western countries.

The second reason is that the non-financial values that the diaspora transfer, such as helping promote democratic governance, is an area that has not yet been studied despite its critical significance. As a consequence, the existing knowledge base on the subject remains limited. Thus, the lack of a solid knowledge base hinders the EU and its member states from formulating policies that can be translated into feasible strategic interventions and realizable actions.

The third reason is the selected focus on a few of the various aspects of the field of migration and development. This is due to not fully integrating migration and development into mainstream traditional development cooperation relations. Both development sectors have now evolved as two parallel fields, one formal and the other informal. They operate side by side, although their goal is the same – eradicating poverty in the long term. The amalgamation of the two development sectors would enable them to complement one another and increase their impact in developing countries, and would also incorporate the diaspora into the established development circles in donor countries.

8. Democracy Building through the Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership

The Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership (JAESP) and the Action Plan adopted in Lisbon in 2007 opened a window of opportunity for the EU and its member states to partner with the diaspora in democracy building in Africa. The partnership was launched to reinvigorate and elevate the cooperation between Africa and Europe in the fight against poverty, injustice, human rights violations, lawlessness, insecurity, political and social instability and disregard for the principles of democratic rights. The JAESP sets out priorities around eight themes: peace and security; democratic governance and human rights; trade and regional integration; the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); energy; climate change; migration, mobility and development; and science, information society and space. It is expected that this new and ambitious programme will strengthen the Africa-EU political partnership and also enhance cooperation at all levels. The priorities for the JAESP programme are to be implemented through ‘successive short-term Action Plans and enhanced political dialogue at all levels, resulting in concrete and measurable outcomes in all areas of the partnership’ (European Union & African Union 2007: 2). Furthermore, the Joint Strategy document states that the programme’s implementation will be guided by the principle of ‘a broad-based and a wide-ranging people-centred partnership, [where] Africa and the EU will empower non-state actors [such as diasporas] and create conditions to enable them to play an active role in development, democracy building, conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction processes’ (European Union & African Union 2007: 3). Finally, the document stresses that both Africa and the EU will pursue policies and programmes that facilitate the active involvement of diaspora/migrant communities in the implementation of the strategy.

Today, the African diaspora in Europe is in the right position at the right time and the right place. The African diasporas have positioned themselves as critical development actors in development policy circles. Diasporas are contributing huge resources to the social welfare and economic growth of their respective homelands that exceed the level of official development assistance.

9. How the African Diaspora can Participate

The participation of the African diaspora in Europe in the JAESP programme is critical. If the African diasporas are incorporated as valued partners into mainstream development circles in the EU, they will play a significant role in promoting and deepening democratization processes. The African diaspora can help promote a culture of dialogue between the political and societal institutions in both continents by skillfully using its bridge-building position. It can also engage in long-distance activities through Internet dialogue, writing and cultural input to influence political debates and public opinion within Africa. Furthermore, the African diasporas in Europe have experience of elections and democratic processes. They can share this democratic experience with the political elites in Africa through dialogue and exchanging skills and expertise.

The African diaspora can also contribute to democracy building in Africa by making its knowledge, professional experience and expertise available to strengthen the capacity of political institutions in Africa and create effective, responsible, transparent, accountable and democratic systems of governance on the continent. Improved capacity of the governing institutions in Africa will boost the capability of states to maintain the rule of law, social order and stability, and deliver adequate social services to people in all sectors and at all levels.

Finally, the African diaspora in Europe can contribute to democracy building in Africa by undertaking lobbying, campaigning and advocacy activities to influence EU policies regarding Africa. For instance, the African diaspora can lobby for the cause of positive actors on the continent – such as human rights activists, journalists, civic-minded community associations and constructive political elites – who are doing their utmost to break from the past and construct a better Africa for themselves and their children. Lobbying for the cause of these positive forces at the host country or at the EU level will give diasporas the necessary power and a political clout with which to counterbalance and neutralize negative activities of the destructive forces in the homeland.

The African diaspora can be engaged to serve as positive bridge-builders and goodwill ambassadors mandated to strengthen and advance the relationship between Africa and the EU.

The lobbying, campaigning and advocacy potential of the African diaspora is an area where mainstream development agencies and civil society institutions in Europe can considerably benefit if they link up with diaspora groups in their campaigning and advocacy activities. Similarly, the lobbying potential of the African diaspora is a source that can be harnessed for the implementation of the JAESP

programme. The African diaspora can be engaged to serve as positive bridge-builders and goodwill ambassadors mandated to strengthen and advance the relationship between Africa and the EU.

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Dr Mohamoud received his doctoral degree in state collapse and post-conflict development in Africa from the University of Amsterdam. Since 2000 he has been a consultant on the African diaspora and development-related issues to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFFIC), the Inter-Church Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO), the National Committee for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development (NCDO) and the North South Centre of the Council of Europe. He has published numerous articles, reports and book chapters on this topic.