



The Citizens & Diaspora Directorate



## **Continental Forum on the Role of the Diaspora in Higher Education, Research, and Innovation in Africa**

[www.diasporaforum2019.com](http://www.diasporaforum2019.com)

November 13-14, 2019

African Union Headquarters

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

### **Conference Report**

### **Executive Summary**

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We would like to thank all the speakers and moderators for allowing us to make use of their presentations.

The Continental Forum on the Role of the Diaspora in Higher Education, Research, and Innovation in Africa was convened at the Headquarters of the African Union, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on November 13-14, 2019. The Forum was organized by the Institute of African Studies, Carleton University, Canada in conjunction with the Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO) of the African Union and funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Prior to the Forum, three commissioned research papers investigated related policy and resource mobilization issues in selected African countries and analyzed experiences of countries in Asia and Europe with academic diaspora engagement.

Represented at the Forum were participants from a broad range of relevant stakeholder groups, including the African Union Commission, African Union member state focal agencies for the diaspora and education, government ministries and officials, African diaspora program administrators, educational leaders, strategic partners including the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the Pan-African Doctoral Academy (PADA), the Association of African Universities (AAU), and the funder. In all, the Forum drew together eighty-five participants from Algeria, Botswana, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, and Zambia. Other states represented included Australia, Canada, China, Germany, India, Uganda, United Kingdom and United States of America.

Forum discussions centred around several issues germane to maximizing the role of diaspora scholars in revitalizing higher education on the continent. The Forum's deliberations led to the following points of agreement:

- Against the backdrop of current practices in which diaspora engagements generally are organized on the basis of personal contacts and individual interactions with prospective host universities, efforts should be made to institutionalize diaspora engagements at the national level. Examples from Nigeria, Ghana and Ethiopia, where governments have established specific commissions and agencies targeting diaspora issues, confirm the desirability and possibilities for such nationally-led initiatives. Other countries in Africa should be encouraged to follow these examples.
- National policies on funding diaspora engagement with African universities are required. Participants agreed that the current donor-led funding models are unsustainable as these funding windows generally have a defined lifespan. Countries were advised to consider lessons from Nigeria, for example, where the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) plans to re-introduce a 2007 funding channel for academic diaspora engagement with universities. Comparable approaches include the African Union Diaspora Fund and the Ethiopia Diaspora Trust Fund. Examples from China and India illustrate how increased deployment of resources by state governments offer incentives to diasporic scholars interested in returning to their respective countries in order to contribute to higher education revitalization efforts. National governments across the continent should consider dedicated funding lines to support such strategic diaspora engagement with institutions of higher education.
- Significant Forum discussion focused on how Chinese, Indian, German, and South Korean governments have harnessed academic diasporas in strategic development and whether their approaches were applicable in the African context. Some participants argued that a growing economy with career opportunities is a prerequisite for attracting the diaspora to return home as diaspora engagement is a middle-class phenomenon. Participants questioned whether and how Chinese and Indian governments invested in the economy and infrastructure before they successfully engaged their diasporas in furthering economic development, or whether government-targeted diaspora programs in fact were drivers that would stimulate economic and infrastructure development. Some indicated that, in the example of China, the diaspora returned because of changes that created a more conducive policy environment.
- On the question of managing intercultural tensions, participants agreed that such tensions can arise around diaspora engagement with universities in Africa. These tensions may stem from a lack of adequate information on what diaspora engagements entail, unmanaged expectations, and resentment from academics at host universities who sometimes feel that returning scholars receive preferential treatment. Consequently, it was agreed that a toolkit would be developed as part of the Forum's deliverables to guide academic diasporic engagement processes as well as to assist host universities in navigating and mitigating potential intercultural tensions.
- Forum participants agreed that a culture of reciprocity is key to successful diaspora engagement. African university hosts challenged the myth of "diaspora knows better," advising that diasporic interventions should emphasize the co-creation of knowledge. Diaspora academics must be encouraged to view their engagement experiences with

African institutions as unique opportunities to gain insights into existing knowledge bases, norms and epistemologies. Such reciprocity would be further deepened through opportunities for African scholars to visit the home institutions of their diasporic colleagues.

- Governments need to look beyond remittances as the main benefit derived from diasporic academics and should recognize and facilitate the full range of benefits that can accrue from such diasporic engagements. For example, efforts should be made to harness the important intellectual contributions of the diaspora as a form of return on investment, especially for those whose initial education was funded by their home governments. Visiting diaspora scholars should be provided with the option of pursuing dual citizenship so that they can contribute to their country of origin beyond their academic interventions.
- African institutions of higher education need to think more broadly about the types of contributions diasporic scholars can make. For example, a visiting diaspora scholar program is an important vehicle for internationalizing curricula. This is highly relevant in the African context where curricula have been static for years in many universities. Additionally, visiting diaspora scholars can be effective agents for promoting good governance and transparency through their interventions at host universities.
- The role of the diaspora in African higher education should be leveraged to offer vital capacity-building and training around emerging pan-African policy issues. In the context of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, for example, academic diaspora can supply critical training as well as offer analyses of the “fourth industrial revolution”. This is particularly relevant because of the current insufficient capacity on the continent to provide training necessary for full comprehension and analysis of various aspects of the trade agreement. African academics across the diaspora straddle various disciplines and possess diverse competencies that African countries, in turn, can leverage to gain knowledge crucial to ensuring the smooth implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement.
- In order to minimise the loss of qualified African academics to other countries, African countries should consider sending scholars to study in countries where they cannot obtain work permits, such as China and Japan, so that they are more likely to return to Africa at the end of their studies.
- Participants agreed that there is a need to leverage the generosity and the success of the Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Program by creating the Consortia of African Diaspora Scholars Programs under which all diaspora engagements in Africa can be coordinated.

The Forum agreed that the following guidelines should underpin diaspora engagement in Africa's higher education sector:

- Programs must be demand-driven from the host country;
- Universities should identify disciplinary or curricula gaps that the visiting diaspora scholar can assist in fulfilling. Diaspora interventions should be requested according to these priorities;
- Processes and institutional structures must be created to onboard the visiting diaspora scholar appropriately. Pre-arrival online engagement with the visiting scholar would facilitate effective and efficient integration;
- Visiting Fellows must be briefed fully on their host institutions' expectations as well as the opportunities and challenges of the academic environment within which they will be working. For example, awareness of differences in research tools and facilities should be made completely transparent so that diaspora scholars are prepared for differences they will encounter;
- On-site host institution champions must be identified to support the work of the visiting diaspora scholars;
- Gatekeepers need be identified and managed; this includes managing any potential conflict with local academics who may view diaspora fellows as competitors; and
- Universities should strive to host clusters of fellows to create more impact.

The Forum also offered recommendations for policy action which are outlined in Appendix 1 below.

## **APPENDIX 1: Recommendations for the African Union Specialized Technical Committee**

Whereas we recognize the crucial importance of engaging the diaspora, and more specifically the academic diaspora, in the development efforts of the continent;

Whereas we acknowledge that the issue of diaspora engagement is a multi-level, multi-directional complex process;

Whereas we emphasize the need for cooperation and coordination among relevant stakeholders to ensure effective approaches to Africa academic diaspora engagement;

Whereas we acknowledge existing initiatives of the African Union resulting from its declaration of the diaspora as the sixth region of the continent, we recommend the following:

1. The AU should advocate for member states to include reference to academic diaspora engagement within existing diaspora policies, and develop diaspora policies where absent;
2. The AU should provide technical support and serve as a resource for member states on how to develop and implement the above-mentioned policies, and facilitate the exchange of best practices and lessons learned;
3. The AU should encourage member states to develop databases of their diasporas;
4. The AU should reinvigorate the Protocol on Free Movement and encourage the streamlining of processes that reduce barriers to mobility across the continent for academics, not only from the diaspora but also for those on the continent;
5. The AU should encourage member states to mobilize and allocate adequate resources for diaspora engagement initiatives in higher education, research and innovation;
6. The AU should consider supporting a consortium of academic diaspora engagement initiatives;
7. The AU should facilitate the development of toolkits to assist African institutions with engaging the academic diaspora;
8. The AU should steer the alignment of academic diaspora engagement initiatives in higher education and TVET; and
9. The AU should encourage the deepening of conversations on issues of academic diaspora engagement.