

*Review*

# The African union, African diasporas and the quest for development: In search of the missing link

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As a development resource, the potential implications of the African diaspora are indubitable. Thus, in underscoring this recognition, the African union has sought to actively cultivate and engage the former as the missing link in the development efforts of the continent. Grounded on a political economy analysis, we argue this move is most salutary and, in deed, long overdue. However, it is grounded on a fallacious mode of thought that predicated the problematique of African development on the external environment and with it, an erroneous prognosis for action that locates the solution from that (external) environment. This is analytically tenuous because a more comprehensive accounting of the African development experience lies in both the external and internal milieu of the continent and how these impact Africa's development efforts. The convoluted internal African environment would likely undermine the development impulses of the African diaspora. For the much sought after development contributions of the AD to take root, a total re-orientation of the African (internal) development environment towards one that is less replete with development-choking obstacles that currently predominate its economies is necessary.

**Key words:** African union, diaspora, African development, leadership, economic development.

## INTRODUCTION

That the developing countries continue to experience intractable development problems is not in doubt. For the sub-Saharan African countries in particular, these problems have assumed greater proportions in the 21st century. Although some of these countries have recently experienced seemingly impressive growth rates in their economics, they are still largely dependent on external forces (foreign aid) and their economies have remained largely monocultural and agricultural crops production dependent. In the 1960s when most of them attained political independence, discussions of the problems of national economic development were lively and upbeat. Several development-focused publications were produced and hopes were raised on the possibility of these countries becoming "developed" within a short while and their leaders were determined that their countries should "catch up" with the developed world. The donor community shared this initial optimism and contributed substantial resources, while African governments drew up comprehensive development plans in this regard. However, these hopes have not been fulfilled as expected because,

whether we consider the political, social and economic or any other aspects of life in these countries, we find the situation worrisome as most African countries have not kept pace with other parts of the world, particularly, Asia (World Bank, 2000).

Describing the state of African underdevelopment, the south African president, Thabo Mbeki in his June 2003 address at the University of West Indies noted that, "Africa today is confronted by a world of financial, investment and trade regimes which unfairly favour the developed world and which prevents the continent from improving the quality of life of its citizens. Over 40% of the people in sub-Saharan Africa live below the international poverty line of US\$1 per day. Africa's share of world trade has plummeted, accounting for less than 2% and more than 140 million young Africans are illiterate, the continent has entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century still confronted by the hard realities of entrenched poverty, death from curable diseases, illiteracy, international marginalization and general underdevelopment, with little prospects for growth and development" (Mbeki, 2003)." This discouraging development si-

tuation is further compounded by the brain drain syndrome - the continuous exit of qualified African nationals to the West in search of better opportunities, principally in the area of employment (Wadda, 2000). While the exact impact of the brain drain is difficult to measure, it is clear that many African countries are experiencing a substantial and sustained outflow of skills, and a variety of indicators give a sense of the value of the human capital lost to Africa to the benefit, especially of developed countries (Association of African Universities, 2007). It is estimated that there are roughly 35 million citizens of African descent (both voluntary/involuntary immigrants and African Americans) living in the United States with a collective purchasing power of about \$450 billion per annum, a sum that, if represented by a single country, would make it one of the 15 largest economies in the world. African immigrants boast of the highest educational attainments of any immigrant group, featuring well over 250,000 scientists and physicians in the United States alone (Bridge-water, 2003). This exodus has left a huge strain on the public and private sectors of many African countries. According to the World Bank vice-president for the Africa region, Obiageli Ezekwesili, more than one-third of Africa's highly qualified professionals currently live abroad, and in some cases, professional groups are more widely represented outside their home countries. More Ethiopian doctors, for instance, she noted, are practicing in the city of Chicago, Illinois than in Ethiopia (World Bank, 2007). This is regrettable as it further depletes the impact of the skilled human element as a development resource that could have been put to productive use to improve the continent's pitiful development scenario.

This declining economic predicament in the developing countries has led to several prescribed solutions which have been attempted by these countries both collectively and individually. There had been calls for and attempts at, sustained national development in the form of "self reliance" or even socialism which have recorded very limited successes, if not outright failure. Similarly, it has been asked whether the successful development example of the newly industrializing economies (NIEs) of Asia is replicable in the other developing countries and whether south-south cooperation as development strategy may succeed given the failure of national-level models. Against this backdrop of the progressively deteriorating economic conditions in Africa and limited possibilities of a fundamental transformation of these economies on their own, attempts at partnership development with the advanced industrial economies have become very attractive, if not indispensable. Examples along this direction have included the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries Lomé conventions with the European Union (which have now morphed into the Cotonou agreement of June 2000), and the new partnership for Africa's development (NEPAD).

More recently, the African Union (AU) and African governments have called for partnership with and embarked

on, the process of engaging the African diaspora (AD) for the continent's development. This partnership call is based on the assumption that, "The African Diaspora constitutes an amazing army of talent to develop the continent and it is essential to form a partnership with this amazing African brain lying outside the continent which has the capacity to lift development of the continent to the next level in order to enable Africa increase its capacity to acquire, use and apply knowledge and increase its access to financial resources" (World Bank, 2007)." While the effort to partner with the AD for the continent's development is relatively nascent and the detailed processes and mechanisms are still being worked out, there is an urgent need to critically interrogate this partnership as a development strategy. Put differently, what are the success prospects for the AU -AD partnership for African development? Is the AD the missing link that, once tapped into, would launch the continent towards sustained development where other attempts have failed? To what extent can the AD act as "the link" that supplies or provides Africa's missing development impulses and how would these be implicated in the continent's development quest?

It is contended here that the potential developmental role of the AD is unquestionable. The AD -AU partnership for Africa's development strategy is most salutary and, in deed, long overdue. However, as currently made, the call is predicated on a fallacious mode of thought that predicates the problematique of African development on the external environment and, with it, an erroneous prognosis for action that locates the solution from that (external) environment. This is analytically tenuous because a more comprehensive accounting of the African development experience lies in both the external and internal milieu of the continent and how these affect its development efforts. If anything, it can be reasonably argued that the African internal environment is the real culprit hindering the continent's development. Granted, it follows that the convoluted internal African environment would likely choke the development impulses of the AD. That is, the contributions of the Diaspora would not yield the much sought after effect unless African governments (who comprise the AU) engineer a total re-orientation of the African (internal) development environment towards one that is less replete with development-choking obstacles that currently predominate their economies, including its institutional deficiencies and operational economic policies for the Diaspora's inputs to take root.

After all, it is, though not in isolation, the economic policies of African governments (arising, in part, from its weak institutions and inept leadership) that produced the constraining internal socio-economic and political environment that 'pushed' or 'drove out' and 'diasporized' these African professionals in the first place. Thus, unless a development-environmental change (orchestrated by the design and implementation of sound economic policies) first occurs, it is not likely that the potential develop-

ment implications of the diaspora would be effectively harnessed and utilized for the envisaged African development. To substantiate this argument, it is imperative to understand the premise of the AU's partnership call.

### **The premise OF AU-AD development partnership**

Against the backdrop of the AU's development efforts and the need constructively engage all Africans and African groups in this regard, "[I]n May 2003, the AU executive council directed the AU to actively engage the diaspora in the development efforts of the continent" (World Bank, 2007). Through the South African government, the AU has held several regional consultative meetings with the diaspora across the world to help to define the strategies and programs for the diaspora to make systematic contributions to the development of Africa (World Bank, 2007).

To facilitate this process, the AU is similarly working with the World Bank to explore and propose new strategies and initiatives for closer collaboration between Africa and the diaspora. The broad understanding is that the diaspora should be directly involved in activities of the AU, and mechanisms should be put in place for the diaspora to partner with the AU and member countries to foster economic and social development

Why the call for AU diaspora partnership for African development? As Xing and Opoku-Mensah (2008) maintain, the recent upsurge and popularity of diaspora discourse and, in deed the AU's call for its development partnership is premised on the assumption that the African diaspora can be mobilized in the service of African integration and development (Asante, 2004; Mbeki, 2003). Members of the African diaspora, it is held, dispose of skills and connections which constitute a potentially massive contribution to the development of the continent, as has happened with the diasporas in some Asian and Latin American countries, and which they are willing to put at the disposal of the continent (association of African universities, 2007). About a third of Africa's highly qualified human resources are presently in the diaspora because they opt not to return to their home countries after completion of their education. Yet, they are not only earning money abroad and sending back to their families, but more importantly, they also represent an incredible human resource of expertise, knowledge, education, experience and entrepreneurship that can be deployed creatively on a host of development fronts in their home countries (Kwoba, 2006). As Luna (2007) points out, the impact of the non-return and inability to leverage the resources of these people has been debilitating on Africa's public and private sectors, in some cases forcing countries to rely on high rates of international consultants to tackle development work. After all, the African immigrants only left Africa physically but not emotionally. As a general characteristic shared by all diaspora, these emotional ties prompt them to maintain links with their countries which of-

ten translate into obligations and concrete commitments, actions and activities. Practically, this means transferring money, ideas, information, knowledge, skills and know-how back home promoting peace dialogues, supporting post-conflict reconstruction governance processes and helping set up local businesses as well as private development projects (UNDP, 2008).

Perhaps, a more telling explanation of the AU-AD engagement was given by Mbeki in 2003 when he traced the origins of African decolonization, integration and unity to the activities of the AD who provided the ideological and motivational basis of both the African emancipation, unity and development projects which came to be championed by the organization of African unity (OAU) in the 1960s through to the 1990s and by the AU today. Whereas the AD in the likes of Henry Sylvester Williams and W.E.B. Du Bois had, in the 1900s, initiated the impetus for the political and philosophical movement of pan-Africanism that culminated in the freedom and political independence of African states, "the time has come for the African intelligentsia in the Americas, the Caribbean, Europe and Africa to come together again and search for ways and means by which to confront the problems of Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century - poverty, underdevelopment and poverty" (Mbeki, 2003). This is particularly so because, acting as atomised entities, African countries has not achieved, and is not likely to achieve, the successes they have to score on the issue of development. Hence, there is need for a united movement of Africans on the continent and the diaspora to partnership and to confront the development challenge.

Thus, against the backdrop of the immense assumed potential contributions of the AD to the African development project, the AU and African governments have both sought to engage this resource in the continent's development efforts. This recognition notwithstanding and beyond the use of catchphrases as "turning brain drain to brain gain" or creating ministerial positions in cabinet or within the presidency to be responsible for diaspora affairs, serious efforts on the part of African governments in terms of strategies and instruments to constructively and effectively harness this potential had been lacking (World Bank, 2007; Xing and Opoku-Mensah, 2008;). This, however, has begun to change as signs of institutionalized efforts and mechanism to court and harness the diaspora potential have emerged.

The AU has not only recognized the diaspora as a crucial development stakeholder, but has held consultations with its diaspora groups in North America, Brazil, the Caribbean and Europe to discuss strategies for designating the AD worldwide as Africa's 6<sup>th</sup> region (along the lines of the regional economic commissions). For example a consultative planning meeting of the North American African diaspora was held in New York in June 2007. Other concrete initiatives have been established in this regard such as the inclusion of diaspora representatives in two major organization for African unity-civil society conferences on

2001 and 2002. Following its formal inauguration, the AU has sought to establish a framework through which the African diaspora would be mainstreamed in the activities of the new AU. This is most evident in the constitutive act of the AU which has been amended, leading to the adoption of a new article 3 (q) which mandates the AU to "invite and encourage the full participation of the African diaspora as an important part of our continent, in the building of the African union" (Legwaila, 2006). To boot, 20 seats on the economic, social and cultural council (ECOSOS) of the AU have been reserved for diaspora organizations. This amendment is a significant milestone in the efforts of the AU to mainstream the diaspora into its policy making and support processes, particularly as they relate to the quest for African development. In addition, several regional consultative meetings have been organized world-wide as a prelude to an AU - AD summit later this year in South Africa with a view to producing a practical program of action for institutionalized partnership cooperation between African and its diaspora (Xing and Opoku-Mensah, 2008).

Beyond these AU - level initiatives are many other African country-specific efforts towards mobilizing the diaspora in the continent's development process. The Nigerian government, for instance, provides the Nigerians in the diaspora Organization (NIDO) office space within its embassy in Washington, D.C. for NIDO coordination, but the organization runs its own affairs. Recently, NIDO executives travelled to Abuja for the 2<sup>nd</sup> science and technology conference under the theme, "connecting Nigeria with her diaspora" to dialogue with their home-based colleagues and officials of the federal, state and local governments on the best and most practical, efficient and cost effective ways to impact the Nigerian economy. Second, the government launched the Linkage with experts and academics in the diaspora (LEAD) program aimed at attracting qualified diaspora to contribute to the development of the Nigerian university system through short-term academic appointments. The first phase of the service which commenced in August 2007, was limited to information and communications technology (ICT), management science and business administration, mathematics, medicine and dentistry and mining disciplines (World Bank, 2007).

Similarly, the South African government has set up the South African network of Skills Abroad (SANSA) as an instrument to achieve the transfer of highly-qualified skills in the areas of education, R and D, S and T, industry, etc. to augment the country's development efforts. Also, its Initiative, where you are in the world which seeks to understand the 'who, where and why' of South Africans living abroad is meant to encourage its diaspora transfer of the skills, if not the people, to their home country (Benton, 2007). In Kenya, not only has the government held consultations with its diaspora on how best to facilitate their participation in national development, but has also been encouraging its diplomatic missions abroad to

market the country through the diaspora communities. Several high profile meetings have been launched with the Kenyan diaspora associations to advance discussion of the Kenya diaspora bill 2007, leading the draft paper on maximizing the potential and input of the Kenya diaspora in the political process, wealth creation, employment generation and poverty reduction. Similar meetings have been held in the U.S and U.K, featuring the minister for planning and national development, the chair of the diaspora bill drafting committee and Kenya private sector chair (World Bank, 2007). And in Ghana, the government has institutionalized links with its diaspora through the establishment of a ministry for diaspora relations; the passing of a law allowing dual citizenship; as well as a law paving the way for the diaspora to vote. It has also introduced a permanent visa program that allows descendants of the first or historical diaspora (diaspora that was forged out of the slave trade) to visit the country without visas after their first visit (Xing and Opoku-Mensa, 2008).

Finally, complementing these initiatives are the efforts of international organizations such as the United Nations development program (UNDP) international organization for migration (IOM), United Nations volunteers and the World Bank in facilitating contacts between Africa and its diaspora. In particular, the world bank not only held an African diaspora open house in November 2007 with over 200 representatives from groups based in the U.S. and Canada to discuss opportunities for closer collaboration, but is also collaborating with the AU in exploring the possibilities for the development of a diaspora remittances investment fund which will be based on global experiences that exploit the benefits of, and leverage, remittances to finance diaspora-led development active-ties in a manner similar to existing mechanisms in Latin America. Recently, it launched the mobilizing the African diaspora for development (MADD) initiative in support of the AU agenda. A memorandum of understanding between the AU and the World Bank was signed in January 2008 to formalize the collaborative efforts on this agenda (Luna, 2008).

These are significant milestones in the AU-AD relations indeed. Not only are these intended to further institutionalize their relations, but also boost the attempt of the AU to sufficiently and effectively harness the development potentials of its diaspora. But the question is, to what extent can the AD contribute to the African development project as has been generally touted?

### **The African diaspora development potential reconsidered**

As noted earlier, the potential contributions of the African diaspora to the continent's development are huge. There is growing evidence that the diaspora can make, and has in deed made, significant contributions to the economic and social development of Africa. In possessing enviable

professional skills, the diaspora can positively impact Africa's development efforts either through short-term placements, sharing research findings or cooperation projects - witness the number of schemes that have been established where the diaspora can serve and provide requisite expertise in the public and private sectors institutions, universities or non-governmental organizations in their countries of origin. They can also share research findings through shared networks of scientists and promote scholars exchange and cooperation projects between foreign and African universities, research institutions and the growing number of "think tanks" in Africa (Legwaila, 2006).

Similarly, the diaspora can contribute to Africa's development effort through sustained advocacy for and on behalf of the continent. This is significant because today, the only stories that the western media focuses on about Africa are not only negative, but tragedies. If it is not drought and its attendant famine, with pictures of malnourished, emaciated and dying African children and sickly adults from preventable and curable diseases, it is civil wars, child trafficking, advance fee fraud, identity theft (as perpetrated by Africans) and like stories (founded or not) that serve to reinforce the negative stereotypes long held about the continent. Paradoxically, some of these stereotypes are reinforced by African immigrants seeking asylum in the west who, in attempts to ensure that their asylum cases are successful, sometimes paint disturbingly exaggerated situations in their home countries. Hardly is a "success" story about, and from, Africa reported freely in the western media. There continues to be a disturbingly bleak portrayal of Africa in the international media, notwithstanding improvements in the continent over the years. The diaspora, excluding the asylum-seeking category which has yet to acquire meaningful resources in their "new" countries anyway, can play a significant role in countering such negative portrayal and gradually, but steadily, cause a shift in the international perception of Africa by mounting sustained advocacy for a more balanced and accurate coverage of the African situation by the international media.

The advocacy efforts can also be channelled into a strong lobby for pro-African policies by the stronger, more developed economies, particularly the United States. These efforts could focus on issues of debt cancellation, re-negotiation of the extant trading regime and more favourable policies towards African countries. For example, the black congressional caucus was instrumental in the passage of the United States' Africa growth and opportunities act (AGOA) and the US 15 billion allocated by president Bush for the fight against HIV/AIDS in 2003 (Aderemi, 2007). Salutary as this is, the diaspora can canvass for, and do more. It is estimated that the annual turnover of this group is a staggering US \$700 billion and over 100,000 US jobs are tied to exports to sub-saharan Africa which already buys at least \$6 billion worth of American products annually. The AD can tap into this

economic reality and turn it into a source of strength for mobilizing more positive attention to the African development cause.

Perhaps, beyond what it can do, the development potential of the diaspora is even more evident in what it has actually done and continues to do to foster development in, and of, the continent. A glaring instance is in the economic power of the remittances that individuals make to their home countries in Africa where the need for substantial capital and workers remittances to boost employment incomes has become very acute and these countries are becoming more heavily reliant on money transfers from its indigenous population abroad as a source of finance (Walker, 2005). For example, 4.1% of Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP) comes from remittances, while Eritrea gets some 6.7% of its GDP from this source (Tebeje & Sanger, 2006). In 2002, the World Bank estimates of documented remittance flows indicate that remittances to Africa accounted for 15% (or US \$ 12 billion) of the total remittances to developing countries. Of this amount, sub-saharan Africa received US \$4 billion, while North Africa accounted for US \$8 billion (Sander and Mainbo, 2005). The actual remittances to Africa could be substantially higher than are reported because the recorded flows to sub-saharan African do not reflect the true picture of the contributions the African immigrants make to their economies as unrecorded flows are exceptionally high (World Bank, 2007). Thus, in Sudan for instance, informal remittances are estimated to account for about 85% of total remittance receipts. These remittances (even the official or recorded ones alone) have exceeded foreign direct investment (FDI) flows for these countries as a source of finance (Walker, 2005). Not only are they more stable than other sources of capital flow such as FDI, Overseas development assistance (ODA) and capital market flows, they have a significant and increasingly very important role in poverty reduction by increasing household purchasing power for essential goods such as food, housing, education and healthcare.

In addition to fostering economic growth through the power of remittances, the AD has embarked on several other development projects in the areas of good governance promotion where it has increasingly demanded a voice, and is participating in the political processes of their home countries. Having lived abroad where political systems and the ethos of good governance have taken root, these people demand such standards and details from African governments, including the right to vote from their foreign locations (World Bank, 2007).

in the area of infrastructure development, the African diaspora has tapped into the information and communications technologies (ICTs/Internet) of the modern information age by starting a host of websites and other online-based architecture and platforms for connecting the continent online and availing it of the vast development advantages that the information age offers. Also, in basic services delivery in the health and education sectors, exam-

ples of sustained AD thematic networks working in collaboration with their home countries' educational institutions to provide virtual and on-line tutoring collection and distribution of educational materials abound. These include the association of Nigerian physicians in the Americas (ANPA), Ethiopian North American health professionals association, West Africa doctors and healthcare professionals network, Abongui ABB, Nigerian association of public administrators (NAPA) have all undertaken mission-specific development projects back in their homelands.

Many more examples of the concrete activities of the AD aimed at fostering the development of the continent abound. But for the most part, these efforts or projects are diaspora-specific. That is, they were, or have been undertaken by the diaspora itself even without the express invitation of the AU and African governments. Remittances for example, are usually made by individual African immigrants for personal, family or other private purposes and not at the instance of the AU (for the express purpose of boosting the African development project in the manner sought and defined by the AU). Admittedly, there isn't a huge difference between private and public development, that is, development that is engendered from the individual, private activities of the diaspora for their families or relatives in their homelands and that engendered directly by the activities of governments. The very call by the AU for an AD development partnership presupposes not only a recognition of what the diaspora development contributions have been, but also the need to take it to a higher level, one that expressly complements the development efforts of the AU/African governments at a much more macro level.

While the development potential of the AD is unarguably huge, there is need, however, to moderate our expectations and optimism of this potential with guarded caution. This is because several factors challenge, limit and in deed, undermine its development contributions, ranging from the diaspora-specific - their weak economic ability stemming from what some have called "weak structural location" in their host countries (Xing and Opoku- Mensah, 2008) to the non-diaspora specific factors - the domestic socio-economic and political environments and government policies of their home countries. Acting either singly or in concert, these factors have continued to limit the potential of the diaspora as a development impulse.

The AD is not the viable economic "power house" it seems to be in the eyes of their homelands and particularly, the AU which courts it's potential. A few examples of arguably rich and influential individuals may exist in both the U.S and Europe that can and have contributed immensely to the African development question. But, as Prah (2006) has argued, one distinctive character of the AD citizens wherever they are found is that they are marginalized in the global economic order. Not only does the diaspora encounter enormous discrepancies and dif-

ficulties as an underclass in western society, in Brazil which is reputed to have the highest concentration of Africans outside the continent, Brazilian Africans are said to be "invisible citizens" in economic life. So lacking in the requisites of real economic power, their relative ability to make significant contributions to the development of their homelands invariably suffers.

Secondly, the conception of the AD as some homogenous entity with a clear cut African development agenda is not only spurious, but unfounded. This is not to suggest that Africans scattered all over outside the shores of the continent are not interested in the continent's development. This is far from it. If anything, one is hard- pressed to find anyone of African descent who does not believe in, and identify with, the continent's development aspirations. The real issue, however, is one of the mechanisms for channelling their collective energies and resources to this end. Quite often, various segments of the AD have understood the African development question, particularly its causes and possible remedies, differently. Thus, they have similarly differed on the best development strategies in support of the continent's efforts—witness the sometimes fractious exchanges between the different diaspora organizations on this issue. This variation implies that a monolithic African diaspora front upon which the AU seems to draw from in its call is very weak, if it exists at all. As a consequence, this weakness has a negative impact on its ability to positively contribute to the African development project in the manner sought by the AU.

It could be argued that the relatively weak structural location and heterogeneity of the AD has not prevented it from making the huge remittances to the continent whose development impact cannot be over-emphasized as noted earlier. The role of remittances is not in doubt. However, as individual remittances to friends, family or any other reasons are individually- defined, they tend to be directed only at very short-term as against long-term projects. The micro-level focus of remittances, while not necessarily regrettable as they do meet specific low-level needs, is not sufficient for the sustained launch of the economy at the macro-level. Thus, unless remittances are channelled and re-focused towards long-term macro economic projects, their potential contributions to national economic development would continue to be in question.

Coupled with these diaspora-specific limitations are the domestic operative environments and government policies of the diaspora home countries and governments. For the most part, the AU's courtship of the diaspora suggests that, a) there are resources missing in the African development quest, b) the diaspora possesses this missing development resources, c) the diaspora can, and is willing, to supply these resources, and d) once supplied, these would 'spark' development. Taken in isolation, these assumptions are valid to some extent, but collectively, they are erroneous. That critical resources are missing in the African development quest (be it leadership,

good governance, active citizenship participation, proper economic policies, and their transparent implementation etc.), and that the diaspora possibly possesses, can and is willing to supply these impulses, is not in doubt. What is not a given is the presumption that once the diaspora supplies these impulses, development is most likely assured. This is incorrect because a careful review of the possible ways through which the diaspora can positively impact African development indicates that the diaspora has, and continues, to supply these impulses, yet not much development has resulted as a consequence as assumed. The huge remittances by the AD are a case in point which, as a formidable development impulse, has not produced the expected results because, contrary to the AU premise, development is more than money (Zack-Williams and Mohan, 2002). The mere availability of financial resources is never a guarantor of development. If money were a development guarantor, some Africa countries such as Nigeria would have no business with underdevelopment. This is because the Nigerian development problem, as owned up by one of its leaders, is arguably not one of lack of resources, but how to constructively utilize them for national development purposes. Thus, it takes a host of other factors for the impact of these resources to be felt in the development process. Regrettably, these factors are severely lacking in much of Africa, particularly south of the Sahara, and no amount of resource transfers would make much development difference if they are not so properly and purposefully utilized.

Additionally, the AU-AD partnership seems to locate the African underdevelopment problem not so much on the internal, domestic environment of African countries, but on the external. Again, this is inappropriate. While the development debate is controversial, it is generally agreed that unilinear explanations of development and underdevelopment (as is inherent in the AU-AD partnership premise) are unacceptable because the different environments (internal and external) are all implicated in the African development predicament. Therefore, to lay the blame on only one of them would be misleading.

Therefore, rather than look up only to the external environment as the key explanation of Africa's development woes, due credence must be given to the internal as well. As argued elsewhere (see Ogom, 2007 for example), serious internal contradictions in the African domestic development environment pose even more daunting problems for Africa's development quest. The neo-patrimonial political order that typifies contemporary African politics is a good example. This order, based largely on a system of patron-client privileges or what is often referred to as 'prebendal system' where state offices are allocated and then exploited as benefices by office holders (Joseph, 1987) is inimical to sustainable development. In such an order, power is not exercised through the formal political institutions. Instead, it is exercised through the interplay between the formal and informal sectors. This produces a form of government that rests on unequal

forms of political reciprocity which link patron with their clients along vertical lines, and the operation of these political institutions is heavily influenced by the exercise of personalized power (Chabal, 2002). Characterized by exchange of favors between strategically located individuals where politics becomes the route to acquiring state offices for the sole purpose of exploitation by the office holders, the very act of governing is reduced to patrimonial clientelism where state offices are doled out in return for administrative and political benefits.

In other words, as a problem internal to the African development environment, this order creates a patronage system or network in which the political boss is linked to subordinate brokers who can guarantee political (electoral) support of a set of individuals who are materially rewarded for their loyalty. Although politicians or patrons (big men) in charge of running the state apparatus may occasionally bolster their authority by charisma or coercion, they are, at best, political entrepreneurs and, in the absence of well-established guarantees of security, individuals necessarily seek attachment to these 'big men' for protection and general advancement in society (Lemarchand, 1972). This translates into 'clientelistic', corrupt and other self-regarding exchanges. While there is nothing particularly new in this pattern, in Africa, it engenders zero-sum politics. The politician, who fails to reinforce his/her position by establishing solid links with those who can help him/her stay in power, easily falls victim to ambitious rivals or the treacherous shifts in factional politics (Le Vine, 1980). This mode of politics exhibits patterns of political behavior which rest on the justifying principle that political office should be competed for, and then utilized, for the personal benefit of the office holders as well as of their reference or support group. The official public purpose of the office which includes, inter alia, provision of good governance, becomes a secondary concern, however much that purpose might have been originally cited in its creation or during the periodic competition to fill it (Joseph, 1987). Thus, political accountability—one of the pivots of good governance, rather than be rooted on well established political processes, rests on the extent to which the patrons are able to influence and to meet the expectations of their followers according to well-established norms of reciprocity. Hence, elections as a political accountability measure, are used as instruments of factional mobilization and the quest for political legitimacy the fulfillment of particularistic obligations which have nothing to do with the emergence of the public sphere that transcends sub-national identities (Chabal, 2002).

The stultifying implications of such an order for development are profound. It creates a development antagonistic environment that chokes the development impulses that are likely to be supplied by the AD whatever and however latently potent these might be. A few examples illustrate this. First, the pivots of development - the concept of servant leadership which advocates that service

ought to be the true mark of a good leader, a leader who always checks to make sure that the peoples' collective (not only well-placed persons, supporters or clients) priority needs are met and that those being led (served) grow as persons that can become wiser, freer, more self-reliant and more likely to become servant-leaders themselves (Ukaga, 2007) do not, and cannot, exist in this order. Second, having lived in the western world, participated in, and experienced the virtues of good governance and their impact on development, the AD is intent, and insists on, the practice of good, effective democratic governance in their home countries. In the context of the extant neo-patrimonial political African order, the African leadership is hardly able to deliver such as it challenges their hegemonic position. This engenders a conflict of views and expectations on governance between the diaspora and their home governments as criticism by the former is least tolerated by the latter (Erhagbe, 2007). In most, if not all cases, the latter often wins as the former is either co-opted by unbelievably lucrative offers or cowed into submission through various draconian means, including but not limited to jail sentences.

Third, and perhaps more importantly, this order emasculates the potential results of one of the ways through which the diaspora contributes to African development – short and long-term placements or formal invitation by governments to serve in key government agencies/ministries in their home countries. Irrespective of the modes of involvement, the experience has been discouraging as the promised expertise, skills or leadership values of the diaspora are not effectively utilized. The story is all too familiar: the diaspora, upon temporarily taking up short-term positions in their as appropriate are, abinitio, full of enthusiasm and zeal to serve. Within a short time, however, they become victims of the proclivities of the patrimonial order where they are literally 'coerced' into submission to do things the "normal way" or get shut out of the scheme of things, including the relieving of such recalcitrant non-conformists of their positions. Umpteenth stories have been told of vibrant AD professionals who have been invited by their home governments to serve only to be disappointedly frustrated out of their service. The squandering or forfeiture of the latent expertise and potential of these prospective diasporas, due to the "choking" excesses of the socio-economic and political environments of the home countries, is not only antithetical to the very objectives of the call by the AU for a development partnership with the AD, but also has the tendency to undermine whatever promising impulses the latter might possess or place at the disposal of African countries in their development quest.

## Conclusion

The foregoing has attempted to critically situate the call by the African union and African governments for engaging the AD in partnership for the continent's develop-

ment. Specifically, it has sought to interrogate the partnership call as a development strategy, querying its success potential and wondering whether the AD is the missing link that, once tapped into, would better foster the launching of the continent towards sustained development where other attempts have not been as successful.

As evident, we have argued that despite factors such as the diaspora-specific and the non-diaspora specific factors which have limited the diaspora as a huge development impulse, the potential implications of the African diaspora as a development resource are still huge. In deed, the call by the African union to engage the African diaspora in the continent's development quest is a salutary in deed. However, as made, the call seems to be predicated on a fallacious analysis that predicates the problematique of African development on the external environment and, with it, an erroneous recommendation that locates the solution from that external environment. This is tenuous because a more comprehensive accounting of the African development experience lies in both the external and internal milieu of the continent and how these affect its development efforts. Discounting the deleterious impact of the African internal development environment as is implied in the current partnership call by the African union is, at best, disingenuous. There is need, therefore, for the convoluted internal African development environment to be interrogated first without which it would most likely choke the development impulses of the AD and undermine its positive development contributions. Thus, unless a development environmental change first occurs, it is unlikely that the diaspora would be the missing link as its potential development implications would not be effectively harnessed by the African union for the continent's development.

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