

# **Supporting Africa's regional integration: The African diaspora – Prototype pan-Africanists or parochial village-aiders?**

## **Executive Summary**

Summary of draft discussion paper for the African Knowledge Networks Forum (AKNF) meeting of 17 and 18 October 2001, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in preparation for the African Development Forum 2001 (ADF 2001), "Defining Priorities for Regional Integration".

Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie, AFFORD

## **Introduction**

This concept paper is presented as a contribution to the debates to be held during the African Knowledge Networks Forum (AKNF) meeting of 17 and 18 October 2001, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in preparation for the African Development Forum 2001 (ADF 2001), "Defining Priorities for Regional Integration". The paper attempts to contribute to two of the five thematic areas, Institutional Arrangements and Capacity and Regional Approaches to Regional Issues. Specifically, it draws on the perspectives and experience of the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD) to sketch out ways in which the African diaspora can support efforts towards increased regional integration in Africa.

The paper first takes a brief look at the African diaspora in historical perspective and its relation with pan-Africanist ideas and ideals. Then the paper presents some data on the numbers and types of Africans in the UK as a way of contextualising the contemporary African diaspora. The next section focuses on African diaspora organisations in the UK, again to provide a frame for understanding contemporary diaspora issues. The following section provides an examination of the context for the current topic by focusing on the challenges presented to Africa by forces and processes of globalisation as well as failures of existing development co-operation. The paper then looks at a possible framework within which to consider diaspora engagement in policy arenas – from the UK and from Africa – as they pertain to Africa's development as well as potential contradictions to be addressed. Finally, the paper concludes with some pointers towards action agendas that we might pursue. The appendix contains background on AFFORD.

In sum, this paper makes the following points and arguments:

1. In spite of the growing diversity of the African diaspora in contemporary times, it is well placed to build on the long tradition and history of the African diaspora contributing effectively to pan-africanist ideas and struggles and contribute to Africa's regional integration.
2. Nonetheless, creating awareness among the African diaspora about the links between the local, the regional and the global is an urgent and ongoing political task.

3. The UK-based African diaspora has grown in diversity recently but is concentrated in one key centre of global power, London, and this gives it a potential for having greater impact than might be predicted from the numbers or resource base alone.
4. The African diaspora in the UK organises primarily on the basis of identity – ethnic, alma mater, region, etc, but these apparently parochial organisations house vast knowledge and operate as active, applied knowledge networks.
5. Although dedicated professional knowledge networks undeniably have important roles to play in contributing to Africa’s development and to regional integration, such a focus must sit alongside a focus on the more diffuse and diverse diaspora organisations.
6. African diaspora organisations have demonstrated their capacity to network together and collaborate in the furtherance of their specific aims, this bodes well for work towards their support for regional integration in Africa.
7. Globalisation presents both technical and political challenges to Africa and from the African diaspora demands both technical responses– marshalling of acquired knowledge and expertise for use by various groups and actors – and political responses – formation of a global African civil society – to hold key actors and institutions, African and others, to account.
8. The sense of marginalisation and alienation felt by probably a majority of the world’s population raises the stakes in the creation of the African Union to ensure that the interests, welfare, and participation of mostly poor Africans drive the process.
9. On the basis of a shared vision and agreement on objectives, the African diaspora must both support an enlightened and progressive African leadership while at the same time holding it to account on agreed agendas and actions.
10. Dedicated knowledge networks with the requisite expertise must address actors in Africa and the diaspora to build their understanding and capacity around the key issues in relation to regional integration.
11. In spite of uncertainties and contradictions, the UK policy framework converges significantly with the African-led agenda vis-à-vis globalisation, development and regional integration and thus creates a basis for the engagement of the African diaspora in working with and through UK institutions and mechanisms to support Africa’s development.
12. Roles exist for the African diaspora – diverse organisations, specific knowledge networks, and individuals – to support efforts towards Africa’s regional integration at the national, sub-regional, regional, and global levels.
13. An action agenda to take matters forward includes sharing the African vision; creating the African Union diaspora; institutionalising the diaspora’s involvement; identifying diaspora players; creating an ICT and regional integration observatory; exploiting ADF 2001; championing the champions; driving the agenda from Africa; tackling the brain drain; lobbying the UK government; creating a pro bono volunteer force; creating the next generation of Africans in the diaspora; and tapping into “third-age” retiring African diaspora resources.

## **Time for action – pan-Africanism for the information age**

If we are to see positive results any time soon all the key actors must work in concert towards agreed and clearly specified goals.

### ***Sharing the African vision***

Leadership – at community, national, sub-regional, and regional levels – must come from Africa with the African diaspora following this lead and working in support of counterparts on the ground in Africa. The vision already exists and has been articulated by Africa’s

leadership, it is in effect a call for a new brand of pan-Africanism for the information age. Now attention must turn to sharing the vision with Africans in the diaspora and agree in broad terms what the division of labour between various actors is to be. Key players such as the ECA, African governments, etc must collaborate with African diaspora networks and organisations to engage in outreach to raise awareness about regional integration, the AISI and specific activities to achieve Africa's long-term, sustainable development. Although Africans in the diaspora have important roles to play, Africa-based actors such as the ECA, governments, etc must communicate clearly to their overseas development co-operation partners the important role they see for the African diaspora. This creates a new framework of development co-operation in which northern donors, policy makers, and NGOs end the marginalisation of the African diaspora but rather see it as a strategic resource available to contribute to Africa's development.

### ***Defining and refining African positions***

Achieving agreement on broad vision is much easier than sustaining commitment all the way through to achieving specified objectives. It is necessary to identify and agree basic principles that underpin common positions. These should build on the concept of the public interest to guide positions in negotiations in international fora. It is important for key actors to encourage debate about and support for this public interest-based approach to create the basis for advocacy that the African diaspora can support. We should expect to learn as we proceed and positions should evolve and grow from our deeper understanding of how Africans actually use ICTs in their everyday life – in business, leisure, interacting with governments, etc. This sets an ongoing research agenda for universities and think tanks to help inform and influence policy in the future.

### ***Creating the Africa Union diaspora***

While celebrating the diversity of the African diaspora our task must be to weave a rich tapestry of African civil society organisations – in Africa and the diaspora – passionate about and supportive of regional integration efforts. We need to create mechanisms of communication, collaboration and co-operation between the global African civil society and between the global African civil society and authorities and policy makers in Africa and elsewhere. We need to set up the accountability mechanisms that extend articulations of visions to definitions of success and identification of short- and medium-term indicators of progress.

### ***Institutionalising diaspora involvement***

We need to create the institutional arrangements to harness the African diaspora's talent, commitment and resources. As part of the Nigerian government's commitment to Nigeria's development and in recognition of the skills and expertise of Nigerians abroad, the president has set up the office of the Special Assistant to Mr. President on Diaspora Activities to attend to matters relating to Nigerians in the diaspora. In 2001 the Ghanaian government held a Home Coming meeting with the Ghanaian diaspora to encourage their involvement and support in the country's development. These are all encouraging signs of African governments' long-overdue recognition of the important actual and potential roles that their diasporas have in developing their countries. The ECA has also played a significant role in recent years to involve the diaspora in Africa's development processes. Given the ECA's pivotal role in supporting African-led and owned development initiatives and regional integration, the ECA should give serious thought to the strategic institutional arrangements that would best enable it to harness in a sustained and effective way the involvement of the

African diaspora in all aspects of its work. From the diaspora's viewpoint, it would be valuable to be able to interact with a dedicated individual with cross-cutting responsibilities to act as the key interface on all diaspora-related issues.

### ***Identifying diaspora players***

Following on from the Regional Conference on Brain Drain and Capacity Building in Africa held in Addis Ababa in 2000 the ECA and partners had already identified the need to create a database of diaspora human resource. The ECA is working in partnership with AFFORD and other agencies to create this database. This database must be dynamic, demand- and needs-driven as well as user- and task-oriented. We must first identify the likely users of the database and specify their needs very carefully. Efforts in the first instance must be targeted at priority needs, eg building the capacity of regional institutions or building the capacity of negotiators in the global fora. Simply capturing names and details in a database with no clear strategy for the use of this data runs the risk of creating a static file that quickly becomes outdated and fails to exploit the enthusiasm and commitment with which individuals will likely provide their details in the first place. A dashing of the initially high expectations will also undermine the credibility of the initiative and make subsequent follow-up all the more difficult. Awareness raising about regional integration, the AISI, etc should be integral to the actual data capture process in order to create synergy between activities and gain maximum return on investment. As the diaspora is constantly under construction we should maintain ongoing outreach efforts to key sectors, for instance to African students pursuing their education in the north. AFFORD has already begun exploring how to interact with UK-based African development studies students in order to tap into their knowledge of Africa and facilitate their ongoing contributions to Africa's development.

### ***Creating an ICT and regional integration observatory***

The African diaspora's vantage point in the north must be harnessed for the benefit of Africa. As we have seen, policies enacted in the north may have direct relevance or implications for Africa. Similarly, issues arise in global fora that require proactive action in Africa by Africans to secure the continent's interests. Diaspora networks need to scan the horizon, pool intelligence, digest it and target it at key decision-makers in Africa. This observatory would also analyse past African experiences of successfully and unsuccessfully strategising in global fora to advance Africa's interests. The lessons learned should be widely disseminated and discussed and used as the bases for future campaigns. This observatory could in the first instance be an informal network of existing knowledge networks with specific areas of expertise and interest along with other organisations with comparative advantages. The observatory would operate in partnership with a similar institution in Africa to ensure that insights were correctly targeted at the right actors.

### ***Exploiting ADF 2001***

The December 2001 ADF meeting on regional integration will provide an ideal opportunity to further reflect on the issues discussed in this paper. The African Technical Advisory Committee (ATAC) should be tasked with assisting the ECA to conduct further research, particularly in relation to the specific ways in which the diaspora can support regional integration in Africa and the emergence of Africa's information society. The ideas presented here can be further developed, refined and concrete proposals put forward for adoption at ADF 2001. In the meantime, it should be possible to proceed more rapidly with the database and other initiatives in order to have concrete findings and results to demonstrate in December 2001.

### ***Championing the champions***

We need to put more effort into raising the visibility of African diaspora efforts in the context of regional integration and the African information society. This will build momentum as success breeds success. Perhaps an annual award scheme can be considered. Such an award scheme for diaspora efforts would be part of a general effort to highlight, celebrate and reward continent-based efforts at regional, national, local levels including a range of actors from civil society, small and medium sized enterprises, etc. Criteria for the search for champions would include visibility, credibility, inspiration, leadership, leverage, knock-on benefits, sustainability, impact.

### ***Driving the agenda from Africa***

We must cultivate a network of advocates among the African diaspora to hold donors better to account in their headquarter cities in the north in their dealings with African authorities and agencies vis-à-vis the continent's development. The aim should be to increase transparency and accountability to ensure that Africa owns and manages her own development, with outside support. We should start with one or two issues around which mobilisation of the diaspora is feasible, learn the lessons and proceed from there.

### ***Tackling the brain drain***

African authorities need to endorse a “3Rs” brain drain strategy: They must first work for the Retention of skilled Africans in Africa by implementing the necessary institutional reforms to value them, reward them, develop and challenge them. Second, they must look to Reversal by encouraging and supporting those Africans in the diaspora who do wish to and are able to return in the short-term, for instance, through the use of International Organisation for Migration (IOM) schemes, etc. Third is Retrieval in which African authorities tap into the knowledge, resources, contacts, networks, ideas, etc of those Africans in the diaspora unable or unwilling to return to Africa permanently. African governments must continue to place their concerns about the brain drain on the agenda when negotiating with overseas development co-operation partners. They must argue for specific schemes that enable the African diaspora to participate more actively and effectively in Africa's development. For instance, harmonisation of immigration and development policies is essential, and this harmonisation should lean towards fewer not more restrictions on the movement of people. At the same time, African governments should not be overly nationalistic in relation to concerns about the brain drain. Regional integration means that any African in the diaspora should be considered part of the valuable pool available to contribute to Africa's development. Given the continued failure of northern NGOs to work strategically and effectively with the African diaspora, African governments should also pursue negotiations with NGOs and multilateral agencies to explore how best they can make more effective use of the African diaspora's human resources. Where NGOs have genuine reasons for posting expatriate staff to Africa – these should be very rare these days – they should take more seriously their responsibilities to help build Africa's human resource capacity by looking to reconnect the African diaspora living on their doorsteps with Africa's development.

### ***Lobbying the UK government***

Given the UK government's stated intention to present a new International Development Bill before parliament and the attention the government is now giving to Africa, African authorities must work in concert with the UK-based African diaspora to advance key policy issues of concern to the continent in terms of regional integration. The apparently imminent nature of this legislative development suggests that collaboration between the African

diaspora and appropriate Africa-based authorities could be a useful starting point for translating words into action. Furthermore, initial activity in one such area as this will create valuable lessons to inform future Africa-diaspora collaboration.

### ***Creating a pro bono volunteer force***

In recognition of their responsibilities as good corporate citizens, many companies create schemes that enable their employees to work among deprived communities to share their skills and know-how. Many Africans in the diaspora work in a range of ICT fields and we should work with northern governments (such as the UK government) to create a scheme that will provide incentives to companies that allow and encourage their African staff to volunteer on projects and assignments that assist Africa's efforts at regional integration and implementation of the AISI.

### ***Creating the next generation of Africans in the diaspora***

As we saw from the data on demographic trends among the African diaspora in the UK, those Africans in the diaspora with direct, lived experience of Africa will gradually disappear leaving behind generations with no direct experience of Africa and varying commitments to the continent's development. Development education that continually creates global citizens among younger generations of the African diaspora who understand Africa's development challenges and are motivated and committed to addressing them is vital. As time progresses these younger generations will identify not with specific towns, villages and ethnic groups in Africa but with the continent as a whole, thereby making the regional integration messages in the development education agenda all the more important.

### ***Tapping into "third-age" retiring African diaspora resources***

Demographic data from the UK suggests that a generation of Africans in the diaspora with a wealth of valuable experience is now available or will soon retire and search for a continued productive life, perhaps in the service of Africa. Significantly, many among this older generation of the African diaspora have memories and experience of previous efforts towards promoting regional integration and pan-Africanism. They have wisdom and valuable lessons to teach younger generations. We need schemes that tap into this knowledge base and create programs to which retirees among the African diaspora can contribute.