

**Development: Developing the bridges between Africa and the
Diaspora**

Statement by

Dr Sabelo Gumedze, Member of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent

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Dakar, Senegal.

Distinguished representatives,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to address you as a member of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent.

The African diaspora represents a huge reservoir of human and financial capital and an important bridge between itself and the African continent. While cognisant of the fact that the African diaspora is diverse, multifaceted and multigenerational demographic spanning every continent and socio-economic status, the diaspora has a great potential in contributing to Africa's socio-economic development. That the African Union views the African diaspora as one of its integral constituency is a step in the right direction. Not only was the African Union's resolution of having the African diaspora as the 6th region of the continent a strategic move, but it was an important vehicle for the development of the continent.

The definition of the African Union of "African Diaspora", composing of "people of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality, and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union" goes into the heart of the African Union's strategy of involving the African diaspora into the continent's development agenda. One of the main areas of concern relating to the involvement of the diaspora in the development of the continent is that of building bridges between the continent and the diaspora. People of African descent in the diaspora are always willing to connect to the African continent and make a difference.

The International Decade for People of African Descent, as proclaimed between 2015-2024, must be viewed as providing an opportunity for deepening the conversation on the contribution of the African diaspora to the development of the African continent. Mindful of the fact that the International Decade is aimed at addressing concerns of people of African descent with a focus on recognition, justice and development, the African diaspora is a formidable constituency worthy of consideration in relation to Africa's development. That Africa needs to bridge the gap between herself and the diaspora in order to develop cannot be gainsaid.

The development contribution of the African diaspora in Africa is far more than remittances. For the most part, the diaspora's contribution to development has been viewed only in terms of remittances that go primarily to support families. In fact, on a global scale, financial contribution in the form of remittances by diaspora to the home country has become a formidable force for development. The diaspora contributes in many important ways such as in international circles, business joint ventures, technological transfer, cultural exchange, religious networks, and institutional linkages.¹ The question remains, what people of African descent who are descendants of enslaved Africans and who have no "family connection" in the continent? Despite the absence of known relatives, they are also willing to contribute to the development of the continent.

¹ See e.g. Livingstone Musoro et al, Building Bridges Between Host and Home: The Zimbabwean Diaspora in the UK. Conference Paper, November 2010.

It has been argued that for Africa's economies to successfully transition from their current state commodity-dominated production to high value-added, job-creation production, the continent must design and implement strategies to harness large amounts of resources efficiently. One such opportunity that is grossly underutilized is engagement of the large African diaspora.² One of the main challenges is the lack of data on the African diaspora. Many African countries are not able to provide an accurate description of their diaspora. Kamau *et al*, for instance, argue that this is a good starting point and "[k]nowing the exact locations, characteristics, professions, incomes, savings, citizenship and length of stay will allow African governments to better understand their diaspora populations and tap into them for the development of their countries."³

Systematic information and data, therefore, are needed to inform smart communication and outreach strategies in relation to the African diaspora. A wide range of mechanisms already exists to collect and disseminate diaspora-related data, such as diaspora surveys and censuses; mapping of diasporas and their skills; and inventories of diaspora skills, experiences and interests. Good examples could be found many African States. For instance, Guinea created a social and professional data bank and established a diaspora network across 110 countries and 50 states in the USA and even conducted a census of Guineans abroad. Kenya created a database of Kenyans abroad, a diaspora skills inventory, and other innovative web-based means to communicate with its workers in other countries. Zimbabwe created a Human Capital website to attract its diaspora to job opportunities back home. Namibia mapped its diaspora communities with a view to assessing how they could help fill labour needs back home. Tunisia was also working on a consolidated online portal for Tunisians abroad, which combines various services for its diaspora.

The Congo, with the help of the International Organization for Migration (IMO) was reported to have a strategic framework on building relations with its diaspora and was also looking at mapping its diaspora and encouraging their return to and reinvestment in the country.⁴ Algeria's General Directorate for the National Community Abroad was created in 2012, and is part of Algeria's national action plan for its diaspora.⁵ Cape Verde's Minister of Communities was set up in 2010. Ethiopia's national policy on its diaspora was endorsed by the House of People's Representatives in 2012 and launched in 2013.

It has been suggested that for purposes of harnessing the African diaspora to support transformative development, Africa needs to be more systematic, structured and strategic in its engagement with its diaspora. Many opportunities for the diaspora to contribute to the development of the African continent remain unexploited largely because of the lack of proper coordination and the inability to envision the importance of the diaspora beyond remittances.⁶ The recognition of the African Diaspora as the sixth region by the African Union is, therefore, a step in the right direction.

² See Anne W Kamau & Mwangi S Kimenyi, 'More Than Just Sending Money Home: Engaging the Diaspora as a Priority for Africa's Development' *Foresight Africa: Top Priorities for the Continent in 2013*. Brookings Institution. Available at www.brookings.edu/foresightafrica (accessed 20 October 2019).

³ *Ibid*.

⁴ See Report on the Diaspora Ministerial Conference, *Diasporas and Development: Bridging Societies and States*. International Organization for Migration. 2013 at p 38.

⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶ *Ibid*.

It has also been suggested that Africa could learn lessons from other emerging and developing countries that have successfully engaged their diasporas for economic and social development.⁷ The example of Malasia's TalentCorp, a partnership between the government, the private sector and the overseas diaspora – works to bring educated and highly skilled Malaysians living and working abroad back to the country. There are also good examples in Africa. For instance, in South Africa, the South African Network of Skills Abroad (SANSA) assists in connecting highly qualified and skilled individuals in the diaspora with opportunities to advance education, research and development in South Africa. In the case of Nigeria, the Diaspora Organization (NIDO) was set up in various countries throughout the world. NIDO draws resources from the synergy of all Nigerian professionals in the diaspora to inculcate ethical consciousness and civic responsibility that will enhance the socio-economic advancement of Nigerians and humanity in general. In Rwanda, a solidarity fund was started, in which the diaspora can contribute to the development of their country.

According to the IMO, connecting with diasporas, and leveraging their various resources for development, involves a multitude of government departments and other partners, and the interest and commitment of government at the highest levels to move such a cross-cutting agenda forward. It was also observed that a governmental ministry or entity dedicated to diaspora issues could facilitate the necessary inter-ministerial coordination and ensure that these communities abroad are included in any national development plan. Ghana and Kenya, for instance, have already established units within their respective governments to oversee diaspora affairs. Kenya was reported to be finalizing a national diaspora policy to engage with its diaspora.

Sierra Leone was reported to be aiming for a diaspora migration policy underpinned by a full legal instrument to define the diaspora's role in the broader post-war reconstruction development efforts.⁸ In Mali, a Department for Overseas Malians within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was established to provide an institutional link with its diaspora.⁹ While these are good examples, it must be noted that more is still required as many initiatives within the continent remain loosely organized, and the diaspora members are unable to undertake large scale collective activities that could contribute towards the development of the African continent.

The role of African embassies and consulates in engaging the African diaspora cannot be overemphasised. The IMO views these as the first port of call for expatriates in need and the first line of action for establishing trust between governments and their diaspora communities. Countries such as Algeria and Morocco have, for many decades, worked actively to support and protect the interests and rights of their diasporas through their consular offices.¹⁰ Cape Verde's Council of communities was set up, among others, to improve the efficiency of consular tasks abroad in support of its diaspora. Guinea involves its diaspora in the national development process by strengthening its capacities, inter alia, for microfinancing ventures and transfer of capital through Government representatives abroad.¹¹

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, 38.

⁹ Peter Mudungwe, *Leveraging the African Diaspora for Development*, African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC) Research Report No 2017/04. 2017, at p 8.

¹⁰ Report on the Diaspora Ministerial Conference, *Diasporas and Development: Bridging Societies and States*. International Organization for Migration. 2013 at p 39.

¹¹ Ibid.

The provision of dual citizenship for the African diaspora will go a long way in bridging the gap between the diaspora and their country of origin. The United Republic of Tanzania, with a small but highly educated and skilled diaspora community abroad and an active strategy to involve them in its overall development agenda, reported that the lack of dual citizenship was a constraining factor both for successful integration in the host country and return to the origin country. There are many other African countries which do not permit dual citizenship, thus isolating and discouraging their diaspora communities in contributing towards development plans.

The fact of the matter is that reaching out and engaging in a meaningful way will require committed leadership by African governments and also the members of the diaspora. Policies on diaspora engagement are likely to be more effective when championed in government at the highest level, through a dedicated ministry or office, committee or commission attached to the Head of State.¹² African States have a primary responsibility to protect, support and enable the African diaspora, both as countries of origin and host countries.¹³

The International Organization for Migration notes that given the diversity of the diasporas, there is no single global approach but a multitude of possibilities to engage them. The African Governments must implement the IMO's three-pillared strategic approach to "engage, enable and empower" diasporas, particularly in identifying policy and programme options to strengthen diaspora participation in development processes.

The International Organization for Migration states that changing "changing approaches to migrants and diasporas in society is a global responsibility."¹⁴ It underscores that "[a] positive global vision of migration and its diasporas can encourage appropriate national and bilateral policies to protect communities against discrimination, xenophobia or abuse, as these directly affect the ability or even desire of expatriates to maintain ties with origin countries and invest in their development."¹⁵

The policies and programmes to engage the African diaspora must be developed and/or strengthened at the African Union level. In developing the bridges between Africa and the diaspora, a new approach is required, both from African States and the African Union. The African diaspora must be given prominence and legitimacy. African States must have proactive policies that encourage diaspora participation in development. The African diaspora must be factored into the larger development discourse, and accounted for in national development agendas. If the African diaspora, could be recognized as one of the main drivers for Africa's development, this will invariably lead to an integrated approach to economic development planning, with the diaspora being mainstreamed in all development efforts.

According to Mudungwe, "...any country wishing to successfully engage with its diaspora, and therefore leverage its development potential, should strengthen its role in bringing together diasporas."¹⁶ The building and strengthening of bridges between Africa and the diaspora is the way to go.

¹² Ibid, 43.

¹³ Ibid, 35.

¹⁴ Ibid, 32.

¹⁵ Ibid, 32.

¹⁶ Peter Mudungwe, Leveraging the African Diaspora for Development, African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC) Research Report No 2017/04. 2017, at p 14.

I wish to conclude with an quote from Junot Diaz, who says

“My African roots made me what I am today. They’re the reason I’m from the Dominican Republic. They are the reason I exist at all. To these roots I owe everything.”

“To these roots I owe everything”

For Africa to prosper, building bridges between Africa and those with African roots is non-negotiable.

Thank you for your kind attention.