

THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

AN ASSET NOT A LIABILITY

“The diaspora of developing countries can be a potent force for development for their countries of origin, through remittances, but also, importantly, through promotion of trade, investments, research, innovation, and knowledge and technology transfers.”
(World Bank Study, Plaza & Ratha, 2011)

The definition of Diaspora comes from the Greek word "dispersal" and the African Union Commission broadly defines the African Diaspora as ***"peoples 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"***.

THE HISTORY.....

There are many reasons why people leave the African continent originally.

The reasons can be such things as:

- Political instability
- Religious persecution
- Economic
- Academic pursuit
- Social

The historical evolution of the African Diaspora can be considered in three waves.

- The first being the forced migration of African during the Transatlantic Slave Trade (16th – 19th century). Mostly from West Africa who were brought to Europe and then onto South and North America. The estimate is that about 12 million Africans were shipped across the Atlantic.

- The second wave of Diasporian Africans can be considered as a result of decolonization. Starting in the early 1950s it can be shown that there was a large increase in migration from Africa to Europe. The concentration of the African Diaspora can be found in the former colonization countries such as UK, France, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Spain and Italy

There is a distinct difference between these two waves of migration. The first through forced migration, over time, blended more into the local population, and through circumstances, losing their connection with their homeland. So although this tranche of Diasporians consider Africa as the “Mother Continent” they are not linked to a specific country in Africa. The concrete connection was lost through generations and it became more a symbolic link.

The second wave had a stronger link through economic, cultural and familial ties to their country of birth many people left their home country for better economic conditions or for better education opportunities but continued to support and have strong ties with their mother country.

The third wave of migration occurred in the early 1980s, mainly fleeing political instability, wars, poverty or religious or political persecution.

Whilst the ties to their mother country are strong, many in this wave have no intention of returning to their country unless circumstances and the reasons for their migration change significantly and for the better.

Obviously since this time there has been a constant ebb of African Diaspora for reasons as highlighted right at the beginning.

Global African Migrant Stock by Region

| | Number | Percent |
|------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| <i>NORTH</i> | | |
| Europe | 7,337,542 | 29.4 |
| North America | 1,239,722 | 5.0 |
| Australasia | 223,095 | 0.9 |
| Subtotal | 8,800,359 | 35.3 |
| <i>SOUTH</i> | | |
| Africa | 13,181,759 | 52.8 |
| Middle East | 2,595,856 | 10.4 |
| Asia | 339,014 | 1.3 |
| Latin America | 58,273 | 0.2 |
| <i>Subtotal</i> | 16,174,902 | 64.7 |
| <i>TOTAL</i> | 24,975,261 | 100.0 |

Source: Calculated from Global Migrant Origin Database v4, updated March 2007,
http://www.migrationdrc.org/research/typesofmigration/Global_Migrant_Origin_Database_Version_4.xls.

THE AFRICAN DIASPORA THE STATISTICS

First Wave – not
a target
population

Third Wave and
beyond – target
population

Second Wave –
possibly 2nd
generation
target
population

Talent Attraction

Many Diasporians, due to their strong ties back home have an equally strong pull to go back home, but have doubts about settling back in.

A 2008 study by the Migrations between African and Europe Project (*MAFE-SENEGAL*) showed that one in four Senegalese emigrants returned to Senegal within five years and more than two-thirds are back within a decade.

Reasons given are as diverse as:

- Want to be close to their families
- Live amongst their own people
- Reconnect with their religions
- Invest in their home country
- Opportunities appear to be greater in their home country

Returning Migrants

These are some of the reasons given from people who returned to their home country

“Personal Security”

“It was difficult to fit in”

“Things will straighten up”

“There has to be a sense that you can achieve something”

“I wanted to come back and give back”

“I can add more value in Africa than in Europe”

“It meant taking a huge leap of faith”

“The electric feeling of being ALIVE in Africa, as crazy and contradictory as living there can be”

Source: The Africa Report; 2013

Clearly there is great opportunity for Multinationals to take advantage of the growing trend for returning Diasporians. The advantages of recruiting from this pool are evident for Multinationals but include such things as:

- Well travelled employees
- Higher education levels
- Often times, experience working in an international environment
- In some instances, exposed to better processes, ERP systems, etc.

According to the 2000 UNESCO report, there are over 300, 000 highly qualified Africans located all over the world, 30,000 of whom have PhDs.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The biggest challenge for any returning Diasporian is cultural mind shift that has to occur. This might sound an odd comment to make, but unless the returning migrant has left his country of origin in the past five – 10 years, there are huge cultural shifts that are required to be made.

How can Multinationals assist?

- ❖ Organise cultural training
- ❖ Provide factual information on the current environment
- ❖ Provide financial assistance in the relocation

Challenges

- Returning migrants could find the 'new reality' hard to adjust and wish to return back to their immigrant country
- Family members could not adjust – particularly if immediate family are not from Africa

The risks

- Shift your mental attitude – life is slower and perhaps less “convenient”
- Break the hold of the West – there is no going back
- Restore African Values
- Rebuild your humility
- Teach the importance of people over property
- Reset your life goals

(source: *A Diaspora Guide to returning Home*, 2014)

Advice from Returned Diasporians