

Africa and Its Diaspora: Organizing and Institutional Issues

By Dr. Chinua Akukwe, Dr. Sidi Jammeh, and Melvin Foote



Organizing Issues in the Africa-Diaspora Partnership

The need to organize a durable partnership between Africa and its people in the Diaspora is so obvious as to warrant little discussion. However, every partnership, even among blood relations, requires a clear *raison d'être*. Why should a Brazilian-African become interested in South Africa's politics or economy? Why should a Nigerian unemployed

university graduate believe that it is in his best interest to nurture a relationship with the Diaspora in the Caribbean? Why should a Senegalese-French citizen pay attention to the status of African-Americans in the United States? Why should a recent immigrant in the United States become involved in Africa-Diaspora partnership issues? Why should an inner city Diaspora family in the United States or Britain show interest

in the political reforms in Kenya? These questions are neither rhetorical nor amenable to easy responses. At the core of the organizing issue in Africa-Diaspora partnership is the need to define a clear, unambiguous reason for this relationship.

“Why” Africa-Diaspora Partnership?

We believe it is fundamental for Africa and its Diaspora to agree on why they should work together. What is the value-added either Africa or the Diaspora brings to the partnership? What are the clear goals and priorities of the partnership? What are the potential pathways for achieving desired goals and objectives? We do not believe the process to agree on mutually beneficial objectives will be easy since each partner has expectations that need to be fulfilled. These expectations exist despite the powerful emotional need for the same people to reconnect and work together.

Africa is likely to expect technical and financial resources from the Diaspora, access to industrialized markets, and assistance in mitigating the effects of brain drain in Africa. The Diaspora is likely to expect increased business opportunities in Africa, the opportunity to fulfill

professional dreams through meeting the needs of the underserved, and the chance to trace familial roots for those who left from unknown shores of Africa hundreds of years ago. The

1) The need for Africans and the Diaspora to collaborate on accelerated development of Africa and progressive improvements in the economy of Diaspora communities within a

It is crucial for the benefits of an Africa-Diaspora partnership to be mutually beneficial. It is unrealistic to expect a partnership where one partner is a designated recipient. Africa and the Diaspora have a lot to give and receive from each other.

The “critical” partners in this process are (1) African Union, (2) the Diaspora, and (3) African governments. These critical partners have the dual role of initiators and facilitators of the partnership.

“How” to organize the Africa-Diaspora Partnership:

We believe that there are “critical” and “important” partners in the partnership between Africa and the Diaspora. The “critical” partners in this process are (1) African Union, (2) the Diaspora, and (3) African governments. These critical partners have the dual role of initiators and facilitators of the partnership.

The “important” partners include Western nations, especially those that ran colonies in Africa; the United Nations system and other multilateral agencies who wield enormous influence on Africa’s development; Africanists comprising individuals and families of non-African ancestry who have spent many years working and raising families in Africa or serving as African experts in their home countries; the organized private sector, especially global conglomerates with operations in Africa and; specific civil society organizations in the West who continue to toil for better development policies towards Africa in the corridors of power of their home countries.

We briefly discuss the critical partners since they have the role of initiating the development of a durable Africa-Diaspora partnership.

The African Union is not only a critical partner but also an indispensable

Diaspora is also likely to dream of a powerful united Africa that can become an economic and political juggernaut, comparable to the United States of America and the European Union.

Neither Africa nor the Diaspora can unilaterally impose its own strategies, policies or goals on the other. The Africa-Diaspora partnership will likely lead to realignment of priorities and organizational responsibilities in the African Union as well force the Diaspora to get better organized.

To move the process of identifying common goals and objectives, we propose that the following issues could become useful starting points for rational discussion on Africa-Diaspora partnership:

specific time frame (15-25 years);

2) The need for Africans and the Diaspora to build specific, political and economic structures that would benefit Africa and its people in the Diaspora;

3) The need for collaboration between Africans and the Diaspora to tackle development issues such as HIV/AIDS, governance, universal primary and secondary education, brain drain, rule of law, private sector growth, increased role for civil society in Africa, and, increased political and economic progress by Diasporians in their adopted countries;

4) The need for jumpstart Africa into the information technology age and create career opportunities for Africans and Diasporians.

player in Africa-Diaspora partnership. Without the African Union's political blessings, a comprehensive Africa-Diaspora partnership is not likely to be successful. The AU should adopt the Diaspora as the sixth region of the continental body to set the ball rolling on building a durable partnership. This adoption should in principle be subject to the Diaspora organizing itself in such a way as to be accorded formal recognition and participation in AU activities.

To play a critical role in initiating the process for a durable Africa-Diaspora partnership, the AU should have a clear policy on the Diaspora and set firm indicators for making the Diaspora the sixth region of the organization. To meet the enormous responsibilities of being an indispensable player in Africa-Diaspora partnership, it is likely that the new AU commission will critically evaluate the Organization of African Union's approach to Diaspora issues, and realign its priorities to meet the present challenge of developing and institutionalizing the Africa-Diaspora partnership. We anticipate that ultimately, AU's role in the Africa-Diaspora partnership will be to create enabling environments for successful collaboration between Africa and the Diaspora, promote the partnership throughout Africa and the rest of the world, and implement evaluation mechanisms for tracking the activities of the partnership.

The Diaspora will have the daunting task of either organizing itself as one entity or by geographic regions,

nations, professional interests and linguistic ties. We anticipate that initially, the Diaspora in the United States, Britain and France will be the first groups to begin discussion on partnership issues with the AU since

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many organizations in these areas have active relationships with African nations and institutions. However, to move this process forward, we envisage that AU will begin a formalized process with a small group of Diaspora organizations, expand the dialogue to involve all geographical

regions, and then reach consensus on partnership issues with the Diaspora from all regions around themes, professional interests, and specific programs. A major organizing challenge of the Diaspora is to meet the inevitable frameworks and indicators that would be set by AU. These parameters are likely to focus on indicators that provide assurances that the Diaspora is better organized, inclusive, and transparent.

African governments represent the practical reality of the Africa-Diaspora partnership. The Africa-Diaspora partnership is unlikely to come to fruition without the creation of enabling environments in African nations. These enabling environments include rule of law, right to political opinion and association, sustained macroeconomic growth, right to private property, stable policies for private entrepreneurship, and public policies that promote social progress. We anticipate that a major focus of the Africa-Diaspora partnership will be the need for accelerated regional integration in the continent to create economies of scale, facilitate exchange of technical expertise across national boundaries, and nurture multisectoral, multinational initiatives in such financial and labor intensive sectors such as power supply, road networks, and telecommunications.

Regarding "how" to organize the Africa-Diaspora partnership, we envisage a series of steps, some of them simultaneous. First, we expect the African Union to develop a strategy on Diaspora. Second, we expect the AU

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to initiate regular dialogue with the Diaspora on partnership issues and how it could become the sixth region of the AU. We anticipate that the Diaspora in the various regions will organize and begin to reach consensus on partnership issues with Africa.

Third, we anticipate that the dialogue on Africa-Diaspora partnership will reach a consensus on **EXPECTATIONS, STRATEGIES, PROGRAMS, DELIVERABLES, MONITORING MECHANISMS, and POTENTIAL RESPONSIBILITY CENTERS FOR EACH ADOPTED ACTION STEP**. Unlike some romanticized view of the relationship between Africa and the Diaspora, we

anticipate a period of intense discussion and negotiations on why the two entities should work together. These discussions and dialogue will likely revolve around ideas and themes for development among the constituencies of both partners. Finally, the ultimate goal of these interactions is to develop a strong institutional framework for the Africa-Diaspora partnership. This framework requires a strong foundation in planning and strategy formulation, a process that had not featured prominently in past efforts to organize Africa-Diaspora partnerships.

“What” are the Organizing Issues in Africa-Diaspora Partnership

We strongly recommend that the envisaged Africa-Diaspora partnership should go through a rigorous planning process that articulates a common vision, a unifying mission, and, shared goals and objectives. We believe that Africa and the Diaspora must conduct systematic Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analyses to determine their needs and value-added to the partnership. We also recommend that during dialogue on partnership issues, participants should conduct futuristic scenario planning regarding the state of the partnership and its constituents, 10, 20, 30 and 50 years from now. This process often serves to temper expectations and provides focus on cost-effective strategies.

A scenario planning approach also has the potential to focus on the

logistics of implementing specific or targeted programs, the role of today's youth but future leaders, and the definition of monitoring and evaluation indicators for tracking progress. We also believe that the role of the Diaspora in NEPAD and other future African conceived and led initiatives, and the role of the “important” partners in Africa's development will figure prominently in any serious planning process.

At the end of the planning process, the AU-Diaspora partnership should have common vision, mission, goals and objectives. These shared attributes should be evaluated at regular intervals or in response to emergency situations.

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Institutionalizing Africa-Diaspora Partnership

The ultimate goal of organizing a durable Africa-Diaspora partnership is to institutionalize the relationship through structures that can stand the test of time. The United Nations today is a symbol of international cooperation and collaboration. Despite inevitable hiccoughs, the UN is still a testament of international resolve and action because of careful attention paid to institutional issues by its founders. These institutional issues include the concept of interrelatedness, the role of specialized agencies for specific functions, the concept of collective legality, and the ever-present threat of sanctions for bad behavior. We believe that the AU-Diaspora partnership could eventually metamorphose into an entity that reaffirms the bond and common aspirations of Africa and its people around the world.

We envisage initially the establishment of an AU-Diaspora Commission that will enjoy all rights and privileges of other commissions in the continental organization and will be active in Africa and the Diaspora. Eventually, we believe that the AU-Diaspora Commission will metamorphose into a political and economic institution, lean, progressive and focused on specific objectives of the Africa-Diaspora partnership. In addition, this entity could become a major platform for unleashing the creative energies of both Africans and their brethren in the Diaspora.

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CONCLUSION

Africa and its Diaspora have the major challenge of developing and sustaining a durable partnership. To build a durable partnership, Africa and its Diaspora must reach a consensus on why they should collaborate, where and when they should work together, and how they should manage the process. Although the destinies of Africa and its Diaspora remain united by blood relations and the common struggles for economic and social progress, no serious attempt has been made to determine specific areas of collaboration and partnership. We believe that the time is now ripe for durable Africa-Diaspora partnership anchored on common vision and mission, and shared goals and objectives.

Dr. Chinua Akukwe is a member of the Board of Directors of the Constituency for Africa (CFA), Washington, DC and a former Vice Chair of the National Council for International Health (NCIH) now known as the Global Health Council, Washington, DC.

Dr. Sidi Jammeh is the Chairman Emeritus of the African Society, World Bank/International Monetary Fund, and a senior economist with the World Bank.

Mr. Melvin Foote is the President and CEO of the Constituency for Africa (CFA), Washington, DC.