



*Stakeholder Roundtable*  
**Engaging the African Diaspora  
In Africa's Capacity Building Efforts**

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International Development Research Centre (IDRC)  
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Organized by  
Association for Higher Education and Development (AHEAD)  
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## Introduction

In August 2004, the Association for Higher Education and Development (AHEAD) released its report, entitled **Semantics Aside: The Role of the African Diaspora in Africa's Capacity Building** (Case Study: Ethiopia). The incentive for the study arose because of the increase in the number of trained professionals emigrating from the African continent over the past thirty years, the perception that this outflow adversely affected the economies of African countries and the concern, in this case, particularly in Diaspora communities of Ethiopian origin, as to how their resources and expertise could be channeled to address the problem.

The purpose of the AHEAD study was not to join the debate about “brain drain” versus “skill overflow”, nor was it intended to discuss the causes or implications of the phenomenon. Rather, it was simply to “examine what Diaspora communities can do to assist in the capacity-building efforts of Ethiopia.”(**Semantics, pp. 1**). “**Capacity-building**” was defined as “efforts associated with community development and/or institutional capacity-building.”(**Semantics, pp. 1**).

The study focused on Diaspora communities of Ethiopian origin who have made their home in Canada. Two important objectives underlined were:

- To identify mechanisms which can be developed to organize the Diaspora communities so that they contribute towards capacity-building”(**Semantics, pp. 2**)
- To examine whether the engagement of Diaspora communities can respond to the capacity-building needs of Ethiopia.”(**Semantics, pp. 2**).

Data were collected through focus group discussions in various Canadian cities and, as well, in Ethiopia. There were interviews and interactive web-based consultations with community leaders, government officials, university students, faculty, and individuals of the Ethiopian Diaspora. The study concluded that there is:

- A growing recognition in the Ethiopian Diaspora of the need to be engaged in Ethiopia's capacity-building efforts”(**Semantics, page 33**)
- A readiness on the part of Ethiopian institutions to work in partnership with Diaspora organizations to ensure effective transfer of resources and skills towards capacity-building efforts”(**Semantics, page 33**)
- Keen interest in Ethiopian civil society to work in partnership with Diaspora groups “ (**Semantics, page 34**)
- A need to move beyond awareness and commitment and to start building the right mechanisms to facilitate effective and sustainable Diaspora engagement. (**Semantics, page 34**).

The study strongly recommended that: 1. **Alternative solutions such as virtual participation be explored, supported and tried” (Semantics, pp 34), 2. Strategic investments be made to develop programs, mechanisms and institutions that will facilitate effective and sustainable Diaspora engagement towards the capacity-building efforts of Africa. (Semantics, pp. 34)**

The Roundtable, which is the subject of this report, should be seen as an immediate follow-up, the first effort by AHEAD and other interested organizations to develop strategies to ensure that the recommendations of **Semantics Aside** will be implemented.

With the support of IDRC, the Stakeholder Roundtable brought together representatives from the African diplomatic corps, the International Organization for Migration, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Canadian Bureau of International Education, Match International Centre, People-to-people Canada and various community groups. The Roundtable comprised three sessions, two plenary and one of workshops.

In welcoming the participants, the Chairperson of the Roundtable, Captain Haile Belai, emphasized that the focus of the event would be the future, an examination of the “How” of implementation. Once more, he reiterated AHEAD's pledge to assist the Ethiopian Diaspora to play its role in capacity -building.

## **SESSION 1**

### **Keynote Address**

- The first session featured a keynote address by Dr. Gilles Forget, Regional Director of IDRC for West and Central Africa, in which he pointed out that, while IDRC was not a “development organization per se”, through its Canadian Partnerships program, it “works with a wide constituency of groups and organizations in Canada that are interested in the contribution of knowledge for development”. How Canadians in the African Diaspora mobilized with this objective would continue to attract IDRC’s attention, as would initiatives similar to this Roundtable organized by AHEAD.
- The papers presented at the Stakeholder Roundtable are highlighted below:

<p><b>Brain Drain and capacity building in Africa</b> <b>Presenter: Mr. Charles Kwenin, <i>International Organization for Migration</i></b></p>
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This paper outlined and described the broad impacts of the Brain Drain on the countries of origin and destination. It identified higher education institutions, health and social services, scientific and technological development, economic growth, governance and democracy as the sectors most affected. The speaker noted that the Brain Drain had undermined Africa's human resources and created a development paradox whereby Africa was paying billions of dollars to recruit expatriate professionals.

In addition, he stressed that the paradigm had shifted, "the concept of return is outdated, and that "it is mobility which must be given priority, benefiting both host and origin countries." At the same time, he highlighted the success of IOM programs in assisting African nationals to return and noted that more than 90% of 2000 professionals and 2, 565 fellowship students who had returned to 12 target and 29 non-target African countries continue to live and work at home after two years.

The paper also saw significance in the OAU's decision in Lusaka, Zambia in July 2001, to request the IOM to assist African countries to facilitate the return of qualified expatriate nationals by promoting the program of Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA).

Finally, it identified the Diaspora as an indispensable partner in the initiative because

- It is a key strategic asset
- It is the biggest donor
- Its official and informal remittances exceeded other financial inflows such as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI ) and Official Development Assistance ODA
- It shares a common vision
- It possesses social, financial and intellectual capital

**The Potential within: Is the African Diaspora a response to Africa's Brain Drain?**

**Presenter: Ainalem Tebeje, Association for Higher Education and Development**

After reminding the session that the Objectives of **Semantics Aside** were:

- To examine whether Diaspora engagement contributes to Africa's capacity-building efforts
- To raise awareness; and
- To contribute to current scholarship/discourse

Ms. Tebeje raised several questions:

- First, whether the African Diaspora was ready for Virtual Participation;
- Secondly, as to how African Diaspora Engagement was perceived in the eyes of Africa;

- Third, whether the Diaspora had the skills to help and how Diaspora resources could be transferred.

In response, she emphasized that

- There is a change in the relationship between the Diaspora and African governments. For example, the Diaspora is recognized as the sixth African component
- And concluded that Africa has the need and the Diaspora the potential to respond to that development need; programs to facilitate active and sustainable Diaspora engagement for skill transfer, resource mobilization and development investment were required; international organizations, African governments and host countries must invest in programs that bring about lasting solutions to the brain drain problem of Africa; and that the African Diaspora should be invited to the table when plans are being made.

**The Diaspora Option: Unleashing the Opportunities, Diagnosing the Challenges”**

Presenter: Dr. Damtew Teferra, *Center for International Higher Education, Boston College*

Starting with questions similar to those raised by Ms. Tebeje regarding what the Diaspora is doing and can do to address what he euphemistically called “brain circulation”, the author explained that the purpose of the paper was to “formulate strategies and devise plans to mobilize and exploit the potential of skilled labour in their place of residence”. He argued that, due to “the fluid nature of brain mobility”, the theory of physical location, which essentially called for the return of nationals to their country of origin, was no longer applicable. Physical mobility was no longer a feasible option. However, the Diaspora faced political challenges, social rivalry, resentment, and intergenerational differences. It was necessary to diffuse the differences to produce collaboration, to formulate deliberate policies to help brain circulation. These could provide a “pragmatic antidote to brain drain”.

He concluded, “That all stakeholders, including national governments, NGO’s, bilateral and multilateral organizations should be actively mobilized to nurture and strategically support the Diaspora option.

## QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS ON PAPERS PRESENTED IN SESSION 1

- *Conditions and incentives should be created at home.*
- *Reintegration was problematic, but emphasized that the program had been 90% successful because it had been activated to respond to the priorities of the specific governments.*
- *Governments should adopt issues of migration as part of development policy*
- *Youth should be engaged; in general, the population should be motivated to ensure continuous response rather than be engaged only in times of crisis*
- *IDRC is willing to work with Diaspora organizations, as for example, through NEPAD or IOM, but the context is important and the Diaspora will not become a specific program of IDRC.*
- *Existing IOM programs are pilot; they are evaluated at the micro-level (e.g. workplace, employer, significant contribution, retention rate, added value)*
- *Programs must suit the country's needs*
- *Regarding labour migration, consider the possibility of excess skills*
- *Make a deliberate attempt to engage in dialogue with host governments regarding opening more legal channels of migration*
- *Explore the role of private sector in approach to policy-makers; engage local government regarding issue of Brain Drain*

## SESSION 2

### **Workshop 1: Capacity -building Through Skill Transfer: The Role of Civil Society**

**Facilitator: Ms. Ainalem Tebeje**

*Objective: To engage participants in a dialogue on brain- drain in Africa and capacity -building through relevant and sustainable skill transfer.*

#### **Recommendations**

- Provide support to Diaspora organizations
- Start dialogue with organizations engaged in similar programs
- Conduct a needs assessment within the Diaspora to make a business case
- The Diaspora must be organized
- Use existing organizations such as the Federation of Municipalities or professional associations

### **Workshop 2. Putting Brain Drain on the Development Agenda**

*Objective: To explore the means whereby the brain- drain may be brought to the Canadian agenda and become part of the public policy process; determine how human resources in the Diaspora may be best utilized*

**Facilitator: Dr. Joseph Manyoni**

#### **Recommendations**

##### *That the Diaspora*

- Establish itself as a constituency
- Gain support of champions
- Engage civil society
- Establish partnerships with recipients, diplomatic corps and African organizations
- Develop a plan of action under the leadership of a small group

### **Workshop 3 Capacity-building through Virtual Participation: Diaspora**

#### **Perspectives**

*Objective: To discuss how, through use of existing Diaspora models, strategies may be adopted to mobilize, coordinate and channel intellectual and material capacity from the African Diaspora to assist in institutional capacity-building and community development.*

**Facilitator: Mr. Gabriel Seifu**

## **Recommendations**

- A multi-faceted approach
- Organize the Diaspora at different levels to reach a critical mass so that various efforts have sustainable effect
- Establish a database
- Create umbrella organizations of similar mind and goals
- Establish a network
- Document best practices in areas of expertise

## Notes on Presenters

**Dr. Gilles Forget** has been IDRC Regional Director for West and Central Africa, based in Senegal, since 2001. He holds a Master's degree in Pharmacology from the University of Sherbrooke and a PhD in Pharmacology and Toxicology from Laval University in Quebec, Canada.

**Mr. Charles Kwenin** has served in the International Organization for Migration (IOM) since 1992 and is currently Chief of Mission at the organization's office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. After obtaining a B.Sc. in Economics from the University of Science and Technology in Ghana, he successfully completed an M.Sc. In Public Administration and Management as well as a Post-Graduate Diploma in Development Policy from the State University in Antwerp, Belgium.

**Ms. Ainalem Tebeje** is Vice- President of the Association of Higher Education and Development (AHEAD) and Chief of Program Analysis and Development at the Status of Women in Ottawa, Canada. A former Journalist, she holds a B.A. in Literature from Addis Ababa University, a Post-Graduate Diploma in Mass Communication from the Institute of Mass Communication in India and a Master's in Journalism from Carleton University.

**Dr. Damtew Teferra** is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education at the Center for International Higher Education at the Lynch School of Education at Boston College. He is also Founder and Editor in Chief of the Journal of Higher Education in Africa and Senior Editor with Professor Philip Altbach of African Higher Education: An International Reference Handbook. He holds a B.Sc. in Biology /Chemistry from Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, an M.Phil in Scientific Publishing From Stirling University in Scotland and a PhD in Higher Education Administration from Boston College, Boston, U.S.A.

**Dr. Joseph Manyoni** has been a Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University since 1971. He has held a British Foreign Office Award, a British Council Scholarship, a Nuffield Sociological Scholarship and has been a Research Fellow at the Centre for Multi-racial Studies at the University of Sussex in England. He obtained his undergraduate degree in Anthropology from the University of South Africa and a Ph.D. from Oxford University.

**Mr. Gabriel Seifu** is currently a Research and Technical Officer at the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency in Ottawa, Canada. He holds a Bachelor's in Engineering from Anna University in India and a Master's in the same discipline from the University of Toronto.

## **Chairman of Plenary Sessions**

**Captain Haile Belai** is the Chief, Safety Oversight Audit Section, Air Navigation Bureau at the ICAO Headquarters in Montreal, Canada. An officer of the ICAO since 1985, he holds a B.Sc. in Commercial and Industrial Economics, an M.Sc. in Aviation Management from Western Pacific University and a Master's in Business Administration from Concordia University.

## **Association for Higher Education and Development (AHEAD)**

Belai, Bathsheba	
Belai, Haile	AHEAD member
Hailu, Temesghen	President
Tebeje, Ainalem	Vice-President
Yimer, Ibrahim	Secretary

# Follow-up visit to Ethiopia by AHEAD

## ROUNDTABLE FOLLOW-UP

Following the Roundtable of November 12, 2004, AHEAD received an invitation from People and Lem Ethiopia to attend the Field Forum International for Ethiopians Living in the Diaspora that was held in Addis Ababa on January 14, 2005.

With the support of IDRC, Mr. Temesghen Hailu, President of AHEAD, participated in the event. Two other AHEAD members, Mrs. Azieb Teferi and Captain Haile Belai were also present.

In presenting a paper entitled "**The Potential within: the role of the Diaspora in capacity-building efforts**", **Mr. Hailu accomplished the following three objectives:**

### 1. Described

- **How AHEAD was founded, its vision and commitment**
- Its three on-going programmes which include donating books and journals to the medical faculties in Jimma, Gondar and Addis Ababa, its awarding of bursaries in partnership with the Getachew Bolodia Foundation and its equipment supply component whereby stethoscopes will be given to students who complete the bursary program
- He also mentioned establishment of the Selamawit Hailu Scholastic award, a new initiative.

### 2. Next, after pointing out that, \* due to the brain drain, Africa had lost one-third of its human capital

- There were more African scientists and engineers in the United States than in the whole of Africa
- The brain drain, according to the UN, posed one of the most serious threats to the economic development of sub-Saharan Africa

- Ethiopia had lost almost 75% of its skilled professionals in ten years and the exodus of skill was affecting academic, health and other institutions in the country.
- Ethiopian institutions were becoming more and more dependent on professional expatriates on whom the government was spending millions of dollars.

He **summarized** the findings of the research project entitled "**Semantics aside: the role of the African Diaspora in Africa's capacity-building efforts**"(Case study: Ethiopia).

In response to the question as to whether the Ethiopian Diaspora were ready and willing to help.

Focus groups in Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa unanimously agreed that:

#### **The Diaspora**

- Has a moral responsibility to pay back their fellow-citizens
- Possesses the necessary intellectual, material and social capital
- Must become full participants in development efforts
- Can work with civil societies and non-governmental organizations
- Can contribute through virtual participation
- Can create knowledge networks among doctors, engineers and other professionals
- Can transfer specific skills in on-time limited missions
- Can participate in development schemes where remittances may be used

Ethiopia and the Ethiopian government were at this time receptive to the idea of Diaspora engagement

Regarding the question as to whether Diaspora engagement was feasible, led by Professor Tetemke Meharai,

Focus groups in Jimma, Gondar and Addis \* welcomed Diaspora engagement

- Emphasized -- the importance of continuity in skills transfer, the usefulness of the Bursary program, --- that transfer technology should be complemented by

training, software and appropriate systems ---that medical supplies could revive health centers --small projects were more important

3. Regarding the next steps, Mr. Hailu stressed that:

- **Africa and Ethiopia should lead**
- **The Diaspora must be recognized as stakeholders, communicate with each other, coordinate activities and work strategically with partners on specific and relevant projects**
- **Projects facilitating Diaspora engagement should be identified, developed and implemented**
- **The UN, NEPAD, the African Union, African governments and host countries must invest in programs to facilitate Diaspora engagement**

**He concluded by urging**

- The Ethiopian government to provide programs attractive to Diaspora groups and in which Diaspora resources could be used
- Ethiopian civil society to start working with Diaspora groups
- All Ethiopian Diaspora groups to mobilize and channel material, intellectual and financial resources for development projects

## **OTHER ACTIVITIES**

While in Ethiopia, the AHEAD President met with the President of Ethiopia, His Excellency Girma Wolde Giorgis, senior government officials in the Ministry of Capacity Building, NGOs, CIDA Ethiopia and civil societies, all of whom were keen to work with the Diaspora. He noted to them that Ethiopians in the Diaspora were ready to give back to their homeland.

