

SEMANTICS ASIDE

*The Role of the African Diaspora
in
Africa's Capacity Building*

(Case Study: Ethiopia)

A Study
by

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

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Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Background

The emigration of highly trained manpower from less developed countries (LDCs) to developed countries (DCs) is a subject of extensive discussion, continuous debate and conflicting interpretations. Different people view differently the movement of trained professionals from LDCs to DCs. Some see this phenomenon as a ‘brain drain’, a loss of skilled manpower and a waste of investment. This school of thought argues that ‘brain drain’ is a loss of talent much needed for socio-economic development in LDCs. Others see the emigration of trained manpower not so much as a ‘brain drain’ but as an ‘overflow’ of human resources that cannot be absorbed by the economies of LDCs. This view supports the argument that the ‘overflow’ of skilled manpower is a solution to the problem of too few opportunities for trained professionals in LDCs.

The purpose of this research study is **not** to debate whether this phenomenon is ‘brain drain’ or ‘overflow’ of skilled manpower. Nor does it seek to examine the causes or implications of the emigration of Africa’s skilled professionals. Nor will it attempt to identify ways to stop or reverse the emigration of skilled manpower out of Africa. While these issues are clearly worth studying and deserve closer attention, they are beyond the scope of this study and outside the mandate of the research organizations.

This project is inspired by a growing awareness among Ethiopian Diaspora communities about their engagement (or lack of it) in the capacity building efforts of their country of origin - Ethiopia. The purpose of the research is, therefore, to examine what Diaspora communities can do to assist in the capacity-building efforts of Ethiopia. For purposes of this study, the term ‘*capacity building*’ is broadly defined to include efforts associated with community development and/or institutional capacity building. Wadda refers to capacity building as “the process by which an individual acquires the requisite knowledge, information and skills to perform more efficiently and effectively in a given vocation or discipline.”¹ Of course, the process involves the individual, but the focus of this study goes beyond that level and includes groups and institutions. This definition

¹ Rohey Wadda, “Brain Drain and Capacity Building in Africa: The Gambian Experience,” Regional Conference on Brain Drain and Capacity Building in Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, February 22-24, 2000

does not embrace efforts associated with responses to emergencies such as famine or war.

In this study, 'Diaspora initiatives' include initiatives or groups of individuals organized around long-term objectives as opposed to *ad hoc* committees and one-time activities such as sporadic fundraising activities often organized in response to emergency situations, such as famine or war.

The study will focus on Diaspora communities of Ethiopian origin, who have made Canada their home. However, the findings are relevant to other African countries. It will identify and document a sample of Ethiopian Diaspora organizations created to channel expertise and resources for development purposes. As well, the study will include an impact assessment of Diaspora engagement in order to see how they are responding to the development needs of Ethiopia.

1.2 Research Objectives

The study will contribute to the current scholarship and debate in three ways:

- It will bring a new perspective to the debate on emigration of skilled manpower out of Africa. There is currently a strong focus on how to stop or reverse the emigration of skilled manpower. This debate leaves out an important question: What mechanisms can be developed to organize the Diaspora communities so they contribute towards capacity building.
- By using Ethiopia as a case study, the study will show the emerging movement among Diaspora communities to move beyond individual contributions, towards organized engagement in capacity building efforts.
- The study will examine whether the engagement of Diaspora communities can respond to the capacity building needs of Ethiopia.

1.3 Research Hypothesis

The research will test the hypothesis: "If organized, Ethiopians in the Diaspora have the potential to be a source of expertise and resource mobilization for capacity building in Ethiopia". The assumption here is that Ethiopians in the Diaspora have the intellectual and material capacity to contribute to Ethiopia's development or capacity building needs.

The study may also shed light on what mechanisms can be developed to facilitate a sustainable transfer of Diaspora expertise and resources for development needs.

1.4 Research Methodology

This research is the outcome of information gathered in a variety of ways in Canada, the United States and Ethiopia. Primary sources of data include interviews, focus group discussions and interactive web-based discussions. Interviews were conducted with the academia, government officials, community leaders, other members of Ethiopian Diaspora and a number of professionals and others in Canada, the U.S. and Ethiopia. The interviews were carried out either in person, by telephone or via e-mail.

Three focus group discussions were held in Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal, which were attended by up to 15 participants each. Most of the participants were of Ethiopian origins, who are either citizens or permanent residents of Canada. Many of these discussants are engaged in some form of Diaspora initiatives. We have also used an interactive web site for discussion purposes. The three focus group discussions were held using a set of identical guiding questions that were posed to participants for discussion and/or debate.

In Ethiopia, focus group discussions were held in Jimma, Gondar and Addis Ababa and interviews were conducted with faculty at different universities, government officials, university students and others.

Print and electronic materials, including books, magazines, journals, newspapers, commentaries, official (government) documents, radio and the Internet constitute a secondary source of data.

1.5 Research Organizations

The principal research organization, the Association for Higher Education and Development (AHEAD) was founded in Ottawa, Canada, in 1999 by a group of Ethio-Canadians, with an objective to pay back a debt to their homeland. AHEAD has as its primary goal to contribute to capacity building efforts in Ethiopia by mobilizing, coordinating and channeling the necessary resources and relevant expertise to Ethiopian higher academic institutions (www.aheadonline.org).

The partner organization, the Getachew Bolodia Foundation (GBF), is a non-political and non-profit-making body established in Ethiopia in November 1994 in memory of the late Dr. Getachew Bolodia, who was Associate Professor of Biochemistry in the Faculty of Medicine, Addis Ababa University (AAU). GBF is devoted to the promotion of higher education and research in Ethiopia. It supports gifted and deserving university students through fellowships in medicine, pharmacy and science. It also engages itself in disseminating scientific information by organising seminars, workshops and public lectures (<http://www.getachew.org>).

Chapter Two – Africa’s Brain Migration

2.1 *Mixed Blessings*

A number of scholars have explored the merits and demerits of migration. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) believes that emigration from LDCs can help alleviate internal imbalances, including population pressures; and the mobilization of human and financial resources abroad can become an additional force for country of origin development.¹ For Dr. Damtew Teffera, Dr. Teketel Haile-Mariam and other scholars, migration provides a ready means for educated, skilled and qualified persons not only to expand their career potential, but also to become an important source of foreign exchange earnings to the home country and to serve as a ‘safety net’ for excess expertise produced, thereby easing social tensions associated with it.²

Migration equips the émigrés with intellectual, social, economic and cultural capacity acquired through ‘hybridity’, which sociologists refer to as “the melding of two or more distinct cultural forms and the creation of a new, distinct entity from this melding.”³ This capacity in turn makes the African Diaspora resourceful for the continent. According to one study, migrants born in Africa are highly educated, urbanized, and have one of the highest per capita incomes of any other immigrant group.⁴ An article in *The Economist* (May 11, 1996) stated: “Three-quarters [of African-born residents in the United States] have some college experience; one in four has an advanced degree.”⁵ Speer cites similar figures:

Nearly 88 percent of adults who immigrate [sic] from Africa to the US have a high school education or higher. The national average for native borns is 77 percent. Only 76 percent of Asian immigrants and 46 percent of

¹ International Organization for Migration, “The Link between Migration and Development in the Least Developed Countries,” 2001

² Damtew Teffera, “Revisiting the Doctrine of Human Capital Mobility in the Information Age,” Regional Conference on Brain Drain and Capacity Building in Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, February 22-24, 2000; Teketel Haile-Mariam, “The Brain Drain from Ethiopia: What to Do?”

³ Atsuko Matsuoka and John Sorenson, *Ghost and Shadows: Construction of Identity and Community in an African Diaspora* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 8.

⁴ U.S. Bureau of Census, quoted in Gabeyehu Adugna, “African Immigration in the Modern Era,” 5 May 1998

⁵ *The Economist* (11 May 1996), quoted in Gabeyehu Adugna, “African Immigration in the Modern Era,” 5 May 1998

*Central American immigrants are high school graduates...their per capita income is \$20,100, much higher than the \$16,700 for Asian or \$9,400 for Central American immigrants.*⁶

Seen in this light, Africans in Diaspora continue to accumulate material, intellectual and cultural wealth that is potentially able to change for the better the socio-economic and political face of Africa. Africans in Diaspora are hailed as big donors to Africa. In the decade of 1980-1990, Africans abroad sent US\$139.4 billion, out of which, 9 percent went to direct investment while 63 percent went to official development assistance and 28 percent to relatives.⁷

Notwithstanding the African Diaspora resourcefulness as presented above, there is a growing consensus that migration has had a number of negative implications for Africa.

The current discourse on the brain drain and capacity building in Africa affirms the negative linkages between migration and development. According to the IOM, “large cross-border movements can be a response to the ever-increasing gaps in living standards and income between countries; and this often means a loss of human capital where it is most needed for development.”⁸ Dr. Damtew and Dr. Teketel also acknowledge the negative impact of what they call ‘brain drain’. This includes the erosion of the national scientific and technological potential of the losing country, the cost of education of emigrants in the home country, and lost investment and benefits due to the departure of specialists needed for the country.⁹

In this context, Dr. Lalla Ben Barka, Deputy Executive-Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), said in February 2000 that African governments had a great responsibility to ensure that “brains remained in the continent; otherwise, in

⁶ Speer (1994), quoted in Gabeyehu Adugna, “African Immigration in the Modern Era,” 5 May 1998

⁷ Meera Sethi, quoted in “Ethiopia the Most Affected by Brain Drain in Africa,” *The Sunday Mirror*, 11 November 2002

⁸ International Organization for Migration, “The Link between Migration and Development in the Least Developed Countries,” 2001

⁹ Damtew Teffera, “Revisiting the Doctrine of Human Capital Mobility in the Information Age,” Regional Conference on Brain Drain and Capacity Building in Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, February 22-24, 2000

25 years' time Africa will be empty of brains."¹⁰ She said that Africa's poor economic performance and social decline had been further aggravated by the under-utilization of those talents and capacities that were available.

Acknowledging the grave impact of the migration of skilled manpower out of Africa, Ms. Genet Zewde, Ethiopia's Minister of Education, said that there was an urgent need to devise effective strategies in which Africa could stem the loss of its intellectual capacity and harness its qualified personnel in Diaspora. She added that efforts should be made to strengthen human resources capacity building and to advance the return of qualified African intellectuals, so that they could contribute to the development of their respective countries.¹¹ Our findings also support the argument that Africa is losing valuable human resources and the statistics are troubling.

More than 300,000 African professionals and experts are believed to be working in Western countries.¹² Dr. Dejene Aredo of Addis Ababa University estimates that each year 20,000 professionals leave Africa for Western countries, hindering the efforts for economic development in the continent. In an academic paper presented at the Organization of Social Science Research in East Africa (OSSERA) in Addis Ababa in May 2002, he claimed that Africa is losing as much as US\$4 billion a year through the brain drain.¹³ Some 60 percent of all Ghanaian doctors trained locally in the 1980s had left the country, in Sudan, 17 percent of doctors and dentists, 20 percent of university professors, 30 percent of engineers had gone to work abroad in 1978 alone,¹⁴ while more than 1,000 professionals left Zimbabwe in the single year 1997 and in 1998 nearly 120 doctors were estimated to have emigrated from Ghana.¹⁵

¹⁰ Lalla Ben Barka, keynote address, Regional Conference on Brain Drain and Capacity Building in Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, February 22-24, 2000

¹¹ Genet Zewde, keynote address, Regional Conference on Brain Drain and Capacity Building in Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, February 22-24, 2000

¹² Philip Ngunjiri, "Africa Continues to Suffer from a Brain Drain," 1 August 2001

¹³ Dejene Aredo, quoted in "Africa: Brain Drain Reportedly Costing \$4 Billion a Year," *IRIN News.org*, 30 April 2002

¹⁴ "Reversing Brain Drain is Africa's Major Challenge," *Arabic News.com*, 23 February 2000

¹⁵ Damtew Teffera, "Revisiting the Doctrine of Human Capital Mobility in the Information Age," Regional Conference on Brain Drain and Capacity Building in Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, February 22-24, 2000

Between 600 and 700 Ghanaian physicians are practising in the United States alone, representing 50 percent of the total number of doctors remaining in the country. An estimated 10,000 Nigerian academics are now employed in the United States. According to the 1993 UNDP Human Development Report, there were more than 21,000 Nigerian doctors practising in the United States alone while Nigeria's health system suffers from an acute lack of medical personnel.¹⁶

According to another UNDP report, in Kenya, it costs between US\$10,000 and US\$15,000 to educate a student for four years and nearly US\$40,000 to train a physician.¹⁷ The IOM report, "Meeting Essential Manpower Needs", stresses the point thus: "Africa bears the cost of raising and educating its professionals in their unproductive years before the latter seek greener pastures abroad."¹⁸

It is not difficult to grasp the huge impact of the loss of these experts whose training consumed colossal amounts of money and energy from their people and countries. In the same vein, Emeagwali laments the fact that Africa is actually training one-third of its professionals for export to the developed nations without bilateral negotiations with those emigrating or the recipient countries, as to how to make them pay their African dues:

*We are operating one-third of African universities to satisfy the manpower needs of Great Britain and the US. The African education budget is nothing but a supplement to the American education budget. In essence, Africa is giving developmental assistance to the wealthier Western nations, which makes the rich nations richer and the poor nations poorer.*¹⁹

To add insult to injury, there are about 150,000 expatriates employed in Africa by foreign aid agencies, against the 300,000 African professionals working in Europe and North

¹⁶ "Reversing Brain Drain is Africa's Major Challenge," *Arabic News.com*, 23 February 2000

¹⁷ Philip Ngunjiri, "Africa Continues to Suffer from a Brain Drain," 1 August 2001

¹⁸ International Organization for Migration, quoted in Philip Ngunjiri, "Africa Continues to Suffer from a Brain Drain," 1 August 2001

¹⁹ Maimouna Mills, "Brain Drain," Interview with Emeagwali for Africa Journal (Voice of America Radio), 17 February 2003

America.²⁰ Kabuga Kabiro of the Kenya Institute of Policy Management blames the asymmetrical nature of the politics of international economy and aid policies, in which qualified Africans are offered little economic incentive to work on local improvement projects. He says, "When donors release aid packages, they often include special provisions that dictate a higher pay scale for expatriate workers while local workers, no matter how skilled, are paid less."²¹ This causes a lack of interest among Africans to work in their own region, hence depriving African economies of people who are vitally needed for the purpose of development.

The situation is particularly dire in Ethiopia to which we now turn.

²⁰ International Organization for Migration, quoted in Philip Ngunjiri, "Africa Continues to Suffer from a Brain Drain," 1 August 2001

²¹ Kabuga Kabiro, quoted in Philip Ngunjiri, "Africa Continues to Suffer from a Brain Drain," 1 August 2001

Chapter Three – The Migration of Ethiopian Skill

3.1 Ethiopia: An Overview

Ethiopia, formerly known as Abyssinia, is a country of great antiquity as evidenced by the finding of the remains of an erect walking human ancestor called *Dinkenesh*, or 'Lucy'.¹ Ethiopia is located in the northeast of Africa and constitutes the heart of what is known as the Horn of Africa. The oldest independent nation in Africa, Ethiopia became a worldwide focus for anti-imperialist sentiment as it resisted the colonial ambitions of Italy twice, in 1896 and 1936.²

According to the 2001 estimates, Ethiopia has a population of almost 65 million people with more than half the population being younger than 19 years of age.³ The overwhelming majority of the population (86 percent) lives in rural areas while the remaining 14 percent lives in urban areas. Ethiopia, like many other African countries, is multi-ethnic, multi-faith and multi-lingual. There are over 80 ethnic and linguistic groups and several religions in Ethiopia.

Agriculture is the mainstay of the country's economy and accounts for half of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 85 percent of the total employment. The country's major exports include coffee, chat (qat), flowers, pulses and oilseeds. The agricultural sector suffers from frequent drought and poor cultivation practices that have over the years combined to cause famine. The country's manufacturing sector is heavily dependent on imports of raw materials, semi-processed goods, spare parts and fuel. The sector is dominated by food processing, metal processing, and production of beverages, textiles, chemicals and cement, and it contributes about 11 percent of the GDP and 15 percent of the total export. About 3 percent of total employment is engaged in manufacturing industries. The mining sector is small and undeveloped, contributing less than 2 percent of the GDP.

¹ Camerapix (ed.), *Spectrum Guide to Ethiopia* (London: Moorland Publishing Company, 1995), 50

² Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855-1974* (London: J. Currey, 1991), 8

³ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), "The World Fact Book 2002 – Ethiopia," 9 December 2002

The 1974 Ethiopian Revolution ended the centuries-old monarchical rule and brought to power a military regime, better known as the Derg. In 1991 the Derg was overthrown by a coalition of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).

The legislative power is currently vested in a parliament consisting of the House of Federation (upper chamber) and the House of People's Representatives (lower chamber). A ceremonial President and an executive Prime Minister head the federal state.

3.2 Ethiopia: Development Profile

Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world with a per capita income of about US\$100. It is sub-Saharan Africa's second most populous country and, according to UNICEF, from 1990 to 2001, 82 percent of the population lived on less than US\$1/day.⁴ Indeed, the UNDP Human Development Index, which measures a country's achievements in terms of life expectancy, education attainment and adjusted real income, ranked Ethiopia 168 out of 173 countries in 2002.⁵

Development indicators reveal that Ethiopia is home to a myriad of problems. To mention a few, almost two-thirds of Ethiopians are illiterate. Barely half of the population has access to primary education. Less than half of primary school-aged children are enrolled in schools; the net enrollment ratio is 43 percent boys and 28 percent girls. The figures drop to 14 and 10 percent for children of secondary school age. Ethiopia is now home to four universities, each with some colleges. Yet, the country's education system lacks teachers, materials and infrastructure.

Access to health care and social services is very poor, with resources concentrated in Addis Ababa and other urban centres. The number of health professionals per unit of population is among the lowest on earth. Medical training is inadequate and medicines are often unavailable, even for the treatment of common illnesses, such as malaria. Only 26 percent of the population of Ethiopia has access to safe drinking water and only 8 percent to sanitation facilities. Urban migration exacerbates the shortage of housing and

⁴ UNICEF, "At a Glance: Ethiopia – Statistics," http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ethiopia_statistics.html

⁵ UNDP, "Human Development Report 2002: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World," 2002, p.152

sanitation in the towns. The under-five mortality rate is estimated at 159 per 1,000, one of the highest in the world. Maternal mortality rates are also at a critical level. Worse still, 2.1 million people are believed to be living with HIV or AIDS in Ethiopia. The 20-49 year-old age-group accounts for around 90 percent of reported HIV/AIDS cases, and this has profound implications for the development of the country, both in human and economic terms.

3.3 Ethiopia: The Exodus of Skill

Virtually all data obtained from research, interviews, focus group and web-based discussions show that Ethiopia is losing much of its skilled manpower due to migration to other countries at an alarming rate. In this respect, Ethiopia is ranked first in Africa ahead of Nigeria and Ghana. According to IOM, between 1980 and 1991, Ethiopia lost about 74.6 percent of its human capital from various institutions.⁶

Dr. Meera Sethi, IOM country representative, said that every year between 1968 and 1996, more than 200 skilled Ethiopians who were sent abroad on scholarships did not return. At the same time, 49 percent of the total Ethiopian immigrants to the United States were being employed in a professional or technical capacity.⁷ Dr. Sethi added that, with only 485 medical specialists and 33 sub-specialists in the country, Ethiopia had already lost more than one-third of its medical doctors in the year 2002.⁸ More to the chagrin of this fact, Mr. Ashenafi Gedamu states that more than 300 Ethiopian physicians are currently working in Chicago alone.⁹

Dr. Dejene Aredo, a senior economist at Addis Ababa University, claims "In Ethiopia we have one full-time professor in economics, in the United States there are more than 100 Ethiopian economists. We do not have enough highly skilled manpower."¹⁰ For his part,

⁶ IOM, quoted in "Ethiopia: IOM and Government Wooing Skills and Funds from Diaspora," *IRINnews Africa*, 5 April 2004

⁷ Meera Sethi, quoted in "Ethiopia Ranks First in the Immigration of Medical Professionals," *Walta Information Centre (WIC)*, 8 October 2002

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ Ashenafi Gedamu, "Causes and Consequences of Brain Drain -How Long Should Africa Tolerate This?" November 2002

¹⁰ Dejene Aredo, quoted in "Africa: Brain Drain Reportedly Costing \$4 Billion a Year," *IRIN News.org*, 30 April 2002

Dr. Damtew Teffera states that, in the period between 1980 and 1991, only 5,777 Ethiopians returned home out of the 22,700 who had gone abroad for further studies.¹¹

More importantly, he informs us that virtually none of the faculty members of the Mathematics Department of Addis Ababa University who were sent abroad for further studies returned; and, as a result, the department was forced to employ fresh graduates on a regular basis.¹² Not surprisingly, therefore, the current teaching positions for the Masters Program in Mathematics at the university are all taken up by expatriates.¹³ Bahr Dar Teachers' College exemplifies the gravity of staff migration. According to Dr. Eyuaem Kebede, in a span of fifteen years the entire experienced staff has been replaced by newer, much younger and inexperienced staff, thereby hindering development in the college of both the teaching and research activities.¹⁴

Dr. Sethi contends that the reasons for so many to migrate to other countries are a "mismatch between professionals and local demand, lengthy recruitment process, poor working conditions, low salaries, no higher education opportunities and human rights violations."¹⁵

Mr. Kibre Moges of the Ethiopian Economic Association shares the same view that brain drain is a serious problem in Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular. He suggests, "...the main reason why professionals leave is politics... across Africa. I still think the main reason why people go is political, the lack of development, democratization and human rights. And some may leave simply for better opportunities". He reiterates: "Today if you visit colleges and universities in this country [Ethiopia] you will not find any lecturers who have been there for more than seven or eight years."¹⁶

¹¹ Damtew Teffera, "Revisiting the Doctrine of Human Capital Mobility in the Information Age," Regional Conference on Brain Drain and Capacity Building in Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, February 22-24, 2000

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ Correspondence with a graduate student of Addis Ababa University (AAU), Spring 2003

¹⁴ Eyuaem Abebe, "Ethiopian Higher Institutions of Learning"

¹⁵ Meera Sethi, quoted in "Ethiopia the Most Affected by Brain Drain in Africa," *The Sunday Mirror*, 11 November 2002

¹⁶ Kibre Moges, quoted in "Africa: Brain Drain Reportedly Costing \$4 Billion a Year," *IRIN News.org*, 30 April 2002

It should be noted that governments of receiving countries have put in place various mechanisms that enrich their human capital at the expense of the sending countries. Key among them was the open nature of their immigration policies of the last quarter of the 20th century. For example, a number of Ethiopian students and professionals chose to stay in the United States as a result of the political and economic difficulties at home that began in the 1970s. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 made it easier for this highly educated group to obtain permanent residence status and remain in the United States.¹⁷

The introduction in the early 1990s of the Diversity Visa Lottery Program by the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) has also contributed to the swelling presence of Ethiopians in the United States. This program requires that the applicant have a secondary school diploma that is equivalent to the U.S. standard or two years' work experience in a job that would require a two-year training. Either requirement reinforces the loss of much needed skill.

Furthermore, approximately 10,000 people of Ethiopian origin entered Canada as refugees and immigrants in the 1980s.¹⁸ Canada's immigration policy has stressed the need for people with knowledge of English or French, several years of education, a record of paid work and experience of urban life, thereby stripping the sending country of its most productive citizens.

Mr. Jim Kolbe, a U.S. Congressman who visited Ethiopia in 2002, said that the brain drain from Ethiopia had robbed the country of much of its talent. He added: "I am troubled personally that some of the best brains and best entrepreneurs of a country like this end up coming to the United States. They rob the people of Ethiopia of their talents."¹⁹ Similarly, Dr. Sethi pointed out that the migration of highly trained

¹⁷ Gabeyehu Adugna, "African Immigration in the Modern Era," 5 May 1998

¹⁸ Atsuko Matsuoka and John Sorenson, *Ghost and Shadows: Construction of Identity and Community in an African Diaspora* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 13

¹⁹ Jim Kolbe, quoted in "Africa: Brain Drain Reportedly Costing \$4 Billion a Year," *IRIN News.org*, 30 April 2002

professionals from Ethiopia to other countries is causing “massive brain drain, economic and technical stagnation and regression.”²⁰

As a matter of fact, of the 18 public institutions of higher learning in Ethiopia, 14 are supported by expatriate staff. The exceptions are Wondo Genet College of Forestry, Jimma and Ambo Colleges of Agriculture, and Kotebe College of Teacher Education.²¹ Among the 14, those with a high proportion of expatriate staff (about 15 percent) are Bahr Dar Polytechnic Institute, Arba Minch Water Technology, Dilla College of Teachers’ Education and Health Sciences, and Nazareth Technical College. In the remaining 10 colleges and institutes the proportion of expatriate staff ranges from one to 12 percent, with a mean of 5 percent.²²

In terms of qualifications, only Addis Ababa University has about a third of its staff trained to a Ph.D. level, followed by Jimma Institute of Health Sciences (22.3 percent), Alemaya University of Agriculture (21.2 percent), and Awassa College of Agriculture (18.5 percent). The remaining 14 institutions have an average of 7 percent of their staff trained to a Ph.D. level. Institutions whose staff is particularly high in the number of first-degree holders are Mekele Business College (75.7 percent), Nazareth Technical College (55.1 percent) and Addis Ababa College of Commerce (50.6 percent).²³

We have seen that the emigration of highly skilled and experienced professionals from Ethiopia has contributed immensely to the erosion of human capital in key institutions which the country needs to address the problems of underdevelopment, including poverty, social disorganization, unemployment, illiteracy, hunger and disease. The exodus of skills has impoverished Ethiopia, sapping its capacity to have a decent standard of living. One wonders, could this be a reason why Ethiopia is now one of the poorest countries in the world?

²⁰ Meera Sethi, quoted in “Ethiopia the Most Affected by Brain Drain in Africa,” *The Sunday Mirror*, 11 November 2002

²¹ Eyuaem Abebe, “Ethiopian Higher Institutions of Learning”

²² *Ibid*

²³ *Ibid*

Chapter Four – The Debate

4.1 *Physical Return vs. Virtual Participation*

Chapter 3 attempts to show the links between the migration of Ethiopia's skilled manpower and the poor state of its institutions. In the process, it paints a rather gloomy picture of Ethiopia and goes to the extent of asking whether this could be a reason for Ethiopia's continued poor economic performance. We now turn to the focus of the study: what to do about it. It is important to see, first, the outcome of some of the mechanisms that have already been tried.

Domestic and international strategies have been put in place to encourage and facilitate the engagement of African Diaspora in the nation- and capacity-building of African countries. With regards to Ethiopia, we saw, in Chapter 3, Ethiopia's Education Minister saying that efforts should be made to advance the return of qualified African intellectuals so that they could contribute to the development of their respective countries.¹

For Ethiopia, the idea of Diaspora intellectuals physically returning for the purpose of supporting capacity-building efforts has failed to bring about the desired results. One example is the program dubbed 'Return and Reintegration of Qualified African Nationals' (RQAN), which started in 1995 and was funded by the European Union and implemented by the IOM in co-operation with participating African governments.²

The program provides returnees with travel and relocation allowances and a supplement to salaries of as much as US\$800 a month for 6 to 12 months. Yet many Diasporas have not participated in the program. According to Dr. Sethi of the IOM, the RQAN saw the return of only 66 Ethiopians to their country, who are now found in the public and private sectors, including education, agriculture, transport, industry and health.³ From this, we can safely conclude that efforts focused on the physical return of skilled Africans have not to date produced the desired results.

¹ Genet Zewde, Regional Conference on Brain Drain and Capacity Building in Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, February 22-24, 2000

² Philip Ngunjiri, "Africa Continues to Suffer from a Brain Drain," 1 August 2001

³ Meera Sethi, quoted in "Ethiopia the Most Affected by Brain Drain in Africa," *The Sunday Mirror*, 11 November 2002

Today, there is a growing consensus on the 'virtual' participation of Diaspora groups in the capacity building of their countries. According to Dr. Damtew, the term 'virtual' is used to signify skilled immigrant participation in nation building without physically relocating them in their native countries where their expertise is sought.⁴ This study will, therefore, attempt to explore this alternative. By using Ethiopia as a case study, we will ask whether Diaspora expertise and resources can be channeled for development purposes in Ethiopia.

4.2 The Diaspora Dialogue

Ethiopians are known for a strong sense of loyalty to their home country and to their families. Ethiopians in Diaspora are no different. They maintain links with their country of origin and attempt to alleviate the hardships of their fellow countrymen and women left behind. Though migration is creating a shortage of experts in Ethiopia, those Ethiopians in Diaspora are among the country's biggest aid donors. Indeed, according to Teklewold Atnafu, Governor of the National Bank of Ethiopia, the amount of remittance Ethiopians send to their homeland has significantly increased over the past few years and now stands at US\$211 million (representing 2.6 percent of the GDP).⁵ Individual family supports in the form of cash transfers have contributed to improving the purchasing power of individuals and families. Diaspora Ethiopians have thereby injected much-needed foreign currency earnings into the country.

Ethiopian Diaspora communities have regularly responded to emergency situations in Ethiopia by providing material and financial assistance for victims of famine, drought, civil war and disease. They have from time to time organized fundraising campaigns and responded to their country's man-made and natural crises. However, these efforts, often started by individuals and on an *ad hoc* basis, have not evolved into long-term initiatives that respond to the development needs of Ethiopia. As a result, the Ethiopian Diaspora community has remained, to a large extent, limited to assisting families and

⁴ Damtew Teffera, "Revisiting the Doctrine of Human Capital Mobility in the Information Age," Regional Conference on Brain Drain and Capacity Building in Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, February 22-24, 2000

⁵ Teklewold Atnafu, quoted in Ethiopian News Agency (ENA), "Diplomats Urged to Persuade Ethiopians in Diaspora to Deposit Their Money in Ethiopian Banks," *Hana News Online*, 6 September 2004

friends and to responding to emergency situations without serious attempts to respond to long-term development needs.

One may thus ask whether Ethiopians in Diaspora believe that they should engage in the development efforts of their country of origin. Our findings point to the affirmative answer. Unanimously, focus group participants in Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto agreed that, since most of their education had been funded by the poor people of Ethiopia, Ethiopians in the Diaspora had a moral and professional responsibility to pay back. A web-discussion participant argued: “The success of Ethiopian professionals and others in the Diaspora is a result of academic and cultural inputs from Ethiopia and Ethiopians. The eternal debt to repay is applicable.”⁶ Another participant said:

*Ethiopians in the Diaspora have the moral responsibility to pay back the people of Ethiopia who gave them free education. The people of Ethiopia have invested in our education with the expectation that we will use the education we acquired to serve our nation. Thanks to the free education we received in Ethiopia, many of us came [to the West] with a good foundation that enabled us either to pursue further education or to secure lucrative professions.*⁷

This study has established the fact that Ethiopians in Diaspora firmly believe that they have the responsibility to help build their country. However, when asked how, the answer was neither easy nor straightforward.

In the three focus group discussions, a set of questions was used to engage participants in a dialogue. A summary of the views, comments and issues raised is presented below.

4.2.1 Capacity Issues

- Focus group discussants in Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa revealed that there is a lack of communication means, structural mechanism and organizational capacity necessary to facilitate the mobilization of Diaspora communities for development

⁶ Tageldin El Khazin, web-based discussions

⁷ Ainalem Tebeje, web-based discussions

efforts. This may explain why Diaspora communities tend to resort to short-term or *ad hoc* activities that can be undertaken by individuals, are designed on one-time basis and do not require long-term commitment.

- The inability to communicate and organize across boundaries may have kept Diaspora communities isolated and disengaged for a long time. With the emergence of the new information technology, it has been possible to see increased interest among Ethiopians in the Diaspora to engage in a dialogue on issues pertaining to their country of origin. (The extensive dialogue underway via the Internet - e.g. www.ethiopiafirst.com - is an example).
- The issues that divide Ethiopia along political, ethnic and other lines are also reflected in her Diaspora population, thereby preventing the coming together for a common goal.⁸ It was noted that the Ethiopian Diaspora could learn important lessons from communities such as Ghanaian, Jewish, Filipino and Lebanese who have extensive experiences in this regard.

4.2.2 Favourable Climate

- Focus group participants admit that they have wasted valuable time waiting for a favourable political climate before they can participate in development efforts in Ethiopia. They said that they now realize that they can no longer wait, as this may be “a distant dream.”⁹ It was commented that efforts to promote rule of law, protect human rights and facilitate democratic leadership in Ethiopia might help build confidence among the Diaspora communities to be part of the development efforts of the country.

4.2.3 Relevance and Sustainability

- Questions regarding relevance and sustainability generated extensive discussions among focus group participants who asked that, given the complexity of the root causes of Ethiopia’s political, economic and social problems, could Diaspora engagement address the real issues of development. Focus group discussants

⁸ Focus group discussions in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto

⁹ *Ibid*

observed that, in order to ensure relevance and sustainability, there was a need to align the role of Diaspora communities with the national development agenda of the country.

4.2.4 Facilitating and Impeding Factors

- Asked to identify factors that would help or hinder their participation in capacity building efforts, focus group participants observed that, unlike in the past, there is now a growing interest among qualified Ethio-Canadians to contribute towards Ethiopia's development efforts. Moreover, the Canadian government is a strong supporter of the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and recognizes the development needs of Ethiopia. Moreover, there are Canadian NGOs with whom Diaspora groups can build partnerships. On the other hand, they regretted the fact that the expertise of Ethio-Canadians is not fully recognized by Canadian governmental and non-governmental organizations and that they remain marginal in Canadian efforts to work in partnership with Africa.
- When asked, "Is Ethiopia herself ready to accept and absorb development support from the Diaspora?" participants responded that Ethiopia is today ready more than ever before to use the input of the Diaspora population. In Ethiopia, people are ready for change, civil society is well established and the government is extending some incentives to attract Diaspora communities. The country seems to be eager to get help within and outside the country in the efforts to eradicate poverty. This social environment is conducive for Diaspora engagement. On the other hand, the bureaucracy is complicated to navigate, the government is suspicious of educated Ethiopians, particularly those of opposition views, and the community is polarized ethnically.

Chapter Five – Survey of Ethiopian Diaspora Organizations

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Meade, Anthropologist

Ethiopians in Diaspora have formed several virtual organizations that focus on institutional capacity building and/or community development. A small-scale survey was conducted to identify some key organizations.

5.1 Ethiopian North American Health Professionals Association (ENAHPA)¹

“Together, we can make a difference.”

The Ethiopian North American Health Professionals Association (ENAHPA) is a non-profit organization established in November 1999 by Ethiopian-born physicians, dentists, nurses, pharmacists, health care and non-medical professionals living and working in the United States of America and Canada.

ENAHPA states its mission thus: to attend to the specific health care needs of women and children in Ethiopia; to assist in the delivery of medical and surgical services to the adults in Ethiopia; to assist in promoting preventive health and providing educational materials and medical supplies to healthcare facilities in Ethiopia; transfer skills and state-of-the-art technologies to healthcare professionals in practice and in training in Ethiopia.

Since its creation, ENAHPA has played a key role in the capacity building of health care in Ethiopia by transferring knowledge, technology and skills, and providing support in human resource development. Most notably, in 2003, it launched a Medical-Surgical Mission to Ethiopia to give free surgical services to heart disease patients. Forty-one healthcare professionals from the United States and Canada, under the leadership of Dr. Engida Asfaw, took part in this mission that successfully performed the first-ever open-heart surgery, the first-ever video-assisted laparoscopic surgery in the country, and the first cardiac pacemaker implant just in nine days. A total of 130 patients underwent

¹ <http://www.enahpa.org/>

various surgical procedures with no fatalities. This free service by the medical and surgical professionals is estimated to be worth about US\$3 million. In addition, the ENAHPA team donated medical instruments and appliances worth between US\$1.5 and 2 million.

5.2 Association for Higher Education and Development (AHEAD)²

“A book at a time, a student a year.”

The Association for Higher Education and Development (AHEAD) was founded in Ottawa, Canada, in 1999 by a group of Ethio-Canadians who resolved on paying back a debt to their homeland and its people.³ A voluntary, not-for-profit and non-political organization, AHEAD has as its primary goal to contribute to development efforts in Ethiopia by mobilizing, coordinating and channeling the necessary resources and relevant expertise to Ethiopian higher academic institutions. It focuses on three avenues of help.

First, AHEAD seeks to assist in the capacity building of universities by responding to academic, infrastructure and resource needs. Second, it sets out to mobilize Ethiopians in Diaspora to facilitate their contribution to and play a role in the capacity building efforts of higher academic institutions in Ethiopia. Third, it strives to facilitate a partnership between Ethiopian and Canadian and/or international organizations.

AHEAD has three distinct but complementary programs: Book Shipment, Bursary Program, and an Equipment Project. Firstly, realizing the serious lack of current medical books and journals at Medical Faculties in Jimma, Gondar and Addis Ababa Universities, AHEAD sends up to 1,000 medical books and journals a year.

Secondly, AHEAD runs a bursary program for medical students from the medical faculties of Jimma, Gondar and Addis Ababa Universities. In 2002, it signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a partner organization, the Getachew Bolodia Foundation (GBF) in which the latter agreed to administer the bursary program on behalf

² <http://www.aheadonline.org>

³ Temesghen Hailu, interview with A. Kebede, via e-mail

of AHEAD. AHEAD has mandated GBF to develop the selection criteria and select its fellows. Under the AHEAD Bursary Program, each year, 18 medical students (6 each from Addis Ababa, Gondar, and Jimma medical faculties) are selected on the basis of their academic standing and financial needs. Those selected receive a monthly allowance of 30 Ethiopian Birr for three consecutive years, covering the entire period prior to their internship. To date, AHEAD has sponsored 72 students, and the first group of 18 students has just completed the bursary program.

Thirdly, AHEAD sends basic training equipment and diagnostic tools for use by medical students during their training and upon graduation.

In May 2002, AHEAD and GBF established a Higher Education Resource Center in Jimma, Ethiopia. The first of its kind in Ethiopia, the Resource Centre was established with the financial support of the Canadian government. The Resource Center is currently in use by faculty and students in Jimma and has become a model for other institutions across the country.

5.3 People to People AID Organization (P2P Canada)⁴

People to People AID Organization (Canada) is a non-profit organization set up by a group of concerned individuals with diverse professional backgrounds to contribute to the fight against HIV/AIDS. P2P Canada is affiliated with People to People groups in the United States, Sweden and Ethiopia, but has its own board of directors and sets its own plans and activities, while coordinating its work with its sister organizations.

One of the programs of P2P Canada is sponsorship of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia. In partnership with the Organization for Social Services for AIDS (OSSA), P2P Canada supported computer training for a total of 64 HIV/AIDS patients, thereby helping the victims to become more productive citizens.⁵ P2P Canada relies on the skills and resources of P2P Ethiopia, located in Addis Ababa, to operate its programs there including the orphan sponsorship program.

⁴ <http://www.p2pcanada.org>

⁵ Gabriel Seifu, interview with A. Kebede, via e-mail

In collaboration with P2P USA, the Canadian chapter helps in the capacity building of the other partner, P2P Ethiopia. Members of the Ethiopian community in the Greater Toronto area are reportedly the main sources of funding for P2P Canada.

5.4 Fana Society⁶

Inspired by and modeled after AHEAD, the Fana Society is a not-for-profit charitable organization founded in 2001 by a group of Ethio-Canadians living in or around Toronto, Canada. It provides support to post-secondary institutions in Ethiopia through two programs, namely a bursary program and the shipment of educational materials. Fana Society provides financial assistance based on both merit and need to students in the Science Faculty of Addis Ababa University.⁷

To date, Fana has supported 10 students selected from various departments for the fellowship and each qualified student earns a monthly allowance of 30 Birr for one academic year. GBF administers the bursary program with its own selection criteria on behalf of Fana Society. Fana Society also coordinates the collection and shipment of undergraduate and graduate level books to the Science Faculty of AAU. Fana Society is making every effort to promote higher education and research in Ethiopia as a way of building and strengthening the country's capacity.⁸ To date, Fana Society has sent 150 statistics and physics books to the AAU Science Faculty.

5.5 Adaptive Technology Center for the Blind (ATCB)⁹

"I don't have sight. However, I have a vision!"

The Adaptive Technology Center for the Blind (ATCB) is a non-profit organization established by Mr. Tamru Ewnetu, an Ethio-Canadian adaptive technologist. ATCB states its mission as empowering the visually challenged community in Ethiopia through the enhancement of skills in the use of adaptive technologies. (The latest census indicates that there are more than 500,000 totally blind people in Ethiopia).

⁶ <http://www.geocities.com/fanasoc/>

⁷ Gelila Tilahun, interview with A. Kebede

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ <http://www3.sympatico.ca/tamru/>

Visually impaired himself, Mr. Tamru understands the multitude of problems experienced by his compatriots in Ethiopia. For example, reading materials in Braille are in short supply in Ethiopia while their production is of poor quality due to the old technology still in use in the country. Consequently, blind schoolchildren, senior students and professionals remain at a disadvantage. They are, for instance, unable to apply modern Braille technology in school or at work. The lack of a sufficient number and variety of Braille textbooks and reference materials causes blind people to depend on sighted assistance to access these sources.

Registered in Ethiopia as a non-governmental organization, ATCB became officially operational in June 2000 with the objective of facilitating access to Braille computing technology to blind people across Ethiopia. Mr. Tamru took his own computers to Ethiopia and approached several institutions in Canada to give him the computers they no longer use. He said that CIDA provided money and the Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission helped with consultancy and financial support.

The center trains local blind community members in computer applications and targets children, students, professionals, the unemployed and school dropouts who are blind or visually impaired. It seeks to enable these beneficiaries to achieve success in their fields of activity through the application of information and communication technology (ICT) skills enhanced by means of adaptive technology. The Center has a wing called Empowering Blind Women of ATCB (EBWA) because women constitute the majority of the visually impaired population in Ethiopia and are the victims of marginalization due to their disability and gender-related discrimination. A dozen blind women were among the first graduates from the Center.

In 2003, ATCB, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) joined in a bid to assist the visually impaired community in Ethiopia in gaining access to information and communication technologies. The two UN agencies will be supporting the ATCB by training blind students, government employees and others to use computers equipped with such adaptive devices as voice synthesizers, magnifying hardware and software as well as Braille embossers, scanners and printers. The ITU and ATCB will provide the

training equipment and software while UNESCO will assist with training and curriculum development.

This chapter has provided an overview of the nature and scope of Diaspora engagement in Ethiopia. All the Diaspora organizations were established in the late 1990s and early 2000s, indicating that the involvement of Diaspora communities in organized development initiatives is a recent phenomenon.

We now move to the Ethiopian portion of the research, where we see how Diaspora engagement is perceived and is being used in Ethiopia.

Chapter Six – Impact Assessment

6.1 Discussions on Diaspora Engagement

The study carried out in Ethiopia builds on the findings of the first part of the study conducted in Canada. Three focus group discussions, each involving up to 25 people, were held at Jimma University Medical Faculty, Addis Ababa University Medical Faculty and Gondar Medical College while people of relevant positions or experiences were interviewed on the subject of the Ethiopian Diaspora's engagement in capacity building.

The Ethiopian portion of the study complements the findings of the Canadian portion that, regardless of the semantics, the departure of skilled professionals is always a concern. This is particularly true of academic institutions. It is, therefore, important to extend the debate beyond semantics and look at the possibilities of engaging those who leave in the development efforts of the country.

In all focus group discussions and at every interview, “not a single person doubted the significance of the contribution by the Ethiopian Diaspora.”¹ A summary of the views expressed is highlighted below:

- Diaspora engagement is necessary and important for development efforts.
- Diaspora engagement is an opportunity for those who wish to contribute to the development of their nation that has paid from its meager resources for their education.
- Diaspora engagement will give the impetus for civil societies to flourish. On a longer time scale, the civil societies will be strengthened to guarantee wider and deeper democratization of the society, which is one of the numerous requirements for a transparent, corruption free, pluralistic society geared towards sustainable development.
- Diaspora assistance can serve as an alternative route for foreign and international aid and may prove to be the best option for development assistance.

¹ AHEAD has agreed to respect the request for anonymity made by focus group participants and interviewees who participated in this study.

- Diaspora role in capacity building facilitates partnership between developed nations and Ethiopia, through the utilization of the skills of their citizens who are of Ethiopian origin and therefore have fewer problems in integrating into the society.
- Diaspora engagement in development efforts gives opportunity to identify economic niches for those who wish to return home or for those interested in investment with mutual benefit for the individuals and Ethiopia.

6.2 Diaspora Engagement: A Critique

A significant number of the people interviewed for this study and those who participated in focus group discussions noted that Diaspora engagement is both necessary for and welcome in capacity building efforts underway in Ethiopia. They also commented that it is, however, an activity with a room for improvement. A sample of initiatives was used to critique current Diaspora engagement in Ethiopia:

- *Fellowships:* Fellowships that support and promote academic excellence in higher education institutions are crucial. For example the partnership between GBF and three Diaspora organizations (AHEAD, FANA Society and Fasil Hailu) is making a difference in the lives of some students at the universities. Focus group discussions revealed that the Bursary Program was useful particularly for those students who come from families with limited economic means. Modest as it is, a significant number of the students would have experienced difficulty to stay in school without the monthly stipend collected through bursaries currently operated by the Diaspora organizations. Moreover, the fact that somebody they do not know cares for them has kindled the desire of the recipients to engage in voluntary activities. The fellows also appreciated the recognition and this has become a source of inspiration to work harder.

According to the university deans who were interviewed, the fellowship program has kindled a sense of competition among students in general. University professors have expressed the desire to see similar engagement by the Ethiopian Diaspora in establishing fellowships that cater to different disciplines, particularly teacher education. Senior officials, at the same time, expressed readiness to complement Diaspora efforts in order to expedite the human capacity building efforts. Privately

owned colleges would also like to be considered in the partnership as they are also engaged in capacity development activities of the nation.

- *Book Shipment:* Book shipment from the U.S.A., Canada and Western Europe continues as different Ethiopian Diaspora organizations and communities are engaged in book collection and assume the costs associated with transportation and customs. Considering the fund, time and effort it takes into shipping these books to Ethiopia, the books have not always been relevant to the communities they were sent to. Diaspora organizations may consider holding prior consultations with recipient organizations in order to determine the nature and scope of the need of academic and other institutions.
- *Medical Supplies* (medicines, medical equipments, hospital beds and other furniture, etc.): These donations have benefited a considerable number of people and institutions. Health stations that were functioning below their optimum have resumed full service thanks to the medical supplies made available through Diaspora projects. In certain cases, however, drugs and equipment that came from abroad were sitting un-utilized in one part of the country while in another part of the country people who could have benefited from the same drugs were unable to access them.
- *Information Technology Equipment:* Computers, accessories and software were shipped to various parts of the country. This was an important investment by Diaspora organizations, particularly in cases where training was also arranged for the users. For computers to be of value to users, it was necessary to provide appropriate systems and software. This was not done in every case.
- *Skill Transfer:* Several physicians, from Diaspora communities, have made numerous visits to many parts of the country to participate in treating patients. The most exemplary has been the visit by a group of cardiac surgeons from North America, who conducted numerous operations in two hospitals in cooperation with Ethiopian physicians. This was remarkable in that not only were much needed services provided, but also skill transfer was made possible through the joint work of physicians from Ethiopian institutions and Diaspora organizations. The expectation that patient follow up will be possible was not, however, realized. Such activities,

recognized for their value in skill transfer, should not be a one-time activity but rather must continue until the required skill transfer takes place.

6.3 Maximizing Diaspora Engagement

Asked to provide views and advice, focus group participants and interviewees made the following suggestions:

- *Strategic Engagement:* In Ethiopia, school participation - equity in terms of gender, region and rural/urban settings - has improved tremendously. However, the quality of education has deteriorated. To address this problem, it was suggested that teacher education is one area where Diaspora engagement could be most relevant.
- *Partnership:* Diaspora organizations should focus on partnership building in order to build the confidence and trust of grass roots organizations. This study shows that some Diaspora organizations are yet to pay due attention to this aspect of their work. The study showed that Diaspora organizations are advised to work with government bodies for specific purposes, such as needs assessment.
- *Mutual Trust and Confidence:* Diaspora organizations must also win the confidence of their partners in Ethiopia through transparency, accountability and by staying apolitical. This is equally true for the Ethiopian partners who need to be transparent and accountable in order to win the confidence of their Diaspora partners and maintain a sustainable relationship. People working on both sides have to be transparent, and committed to common objectives. We have to learn from cases where issues of accountability and fund mismanagement have resulted in the closure of highly valued initiatives. These lessons are important for future undertakings.
- *Sustainability:* The highly valuable assistance to the country catered by the various Diaspora groups has not always been sustainable. This emanates from the heterogeneity of the groups in terms of composition on the basis of political allegiances, personal ambitions, wishes and preferences. It was commented that Diaspora groups would be able to stay together only when their activities are geared towards the common good of the country.

- *'Small is beautiful'*: Major Diaspora organizations that started with sizeable budget and considerable investment in time and energy were short lived. According to the study, some of the shortcomings were related to poor management. It was observed that smaller Diaspora organizations with a focus and manageable programs have had relatively better impact in operation. Some of the smaller Diaspora organizations may provide valuable lessons for Diaspora engagement.
- *Coordination*: There is a need to coordinate Diaspora efforts to share experiences and to avoid duplication of efforts. Current Diaspora efforts need to be better organized, including better communication and networking among Diaspora organizations. There must be mechanisms for exchange of information through publications and other tools.

Participants in this study observed that a person who is productive in the West might not necessarily be productive in Ethiopia, partly due to the lack of necessary infrastructure and conducive working environment. Also, the highly qualified and badly sought people Ethiopia is after are also in high demand elsewhere. As in the case of the physical return project, it was also seen that some of those who returned were not as productive as it was hoped due to dissatisfaction by the situation at home.

It is, therefore, agreed to find more strategic ways to use the expertise and input of the Diaspora communities and organizations wherever they are. If properly coordinated, Diaspora initiatives could be agents for skill transfer to the country while professionals at home will carry out development programs.

Chapter Seven – Conclusion

In light of the foregoing discussions, it is logical to conclude that emigration from Africa has, to a large degree, created the shortage of essential skills and trained people, with far-reaching implications for the continent. Above all else and with sad irony, the continent may have built but has failed to retain the capacity required for meeting its basic needs.

Much to our regret, this issue has been treated, for far too long, as a subject for conferences and research studies. Thus, valuable time was wasted over semantics - debating whether this was brain drain or overflow of skilled manpower. The reality is now evident. Semantics aside, the emigration of skilled manpower has had colossal effects on Africa and if we continue to treat it as an academic subject, in the words of Ben Barka, "...in 25 years' time Africa will be empty of brains".

Again, in our research, we found no evidence of reaching out to the African Diaspora. The African Diaspora was kept on the sideline, a subject to study or a cargo to be taken back home. This study is the voice of the Diaspora and the message is clear: We must be part of the solution.

As a case study, Ethiopia provides valuable lessons. Ethiopia is first in Africa in losing its skilled manpower. The country has lost close to 75 percent of its human capital from various institutions, including one-third of its doctors. Over the past 10-15 years, around 50 percent of Ethiopians who traveled abroad for training did not return. Worse, programs such as the RQAN, designed to bring back those who have left, did not produce the desired results. This has meant the depletion of the human capital badly needed for the country's overall development. The net result is the country's inability to find the resources that can improve the basic welfare of its people.

Semantics Aside is perhaps the first study to focus on the Diaspora population. In the case of Ethiopia, the study attempted to engage the Diaspora community in a debate regarding its contribution to and role in capacity building efforts.

First of all and beyond any doubt, the study has established that there is a growing recognition in the Ethiopian Diaspora of the need to be engaged in Ethiopia's capacity building efforts. During discussions, there was unanimous agreement that Ethiopians in the Diaspora have moral and other responsibilities to contribute to their people and motherland. They also recognize that they have the resources and expertise that can be used for Ethiopia's capacity building efforts. More importantly, they acknowledge the fact that they can no longer remain disengaged.

On the Ethiopian side, the study shows that Ethiopians welcome Diaspora engagement and recognize its potential for capacity building. It is seen not only as a way to help Ethiopia but also as an opportunity for the Ethiopian Diaspora to pay back the people who invested in their education. There is also 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. It is believed that:

- Ethiopians in the Diaspora have the potential to be agents for skill transfer;
- Diaspora engagement will give much needed impetus for civil societies to flourish;
- Diaspora engagement can complement foreign and international aid;
- Diaspora engagement can contribute towards democracy and good governance;
- Diaspora engagement might help identify the right economic and other niches for those who consider physical return as an option; and,
- Ethiopian Diaspora can be a powerful lobby on behalf of the people and country.

The study, however, shows that Diaspora engagement is easier said than done. During focus group discussions, it was evident that to engage in capacity building efforts, the Ethiopian Diaspora will need more than just commitment. In our study, we have seen evidence of committed individuals who have come together to engage in capacity building efforts in a modest way. However, these small groups cannot be sustained on voluntary basis. Soon, the momentum will wane and fatigue will set in.

At the same time, as indicated in Chapter 6, some early signs of warning associated with Diaspora engagement have been identified through this study. In the case of Ethiopia, not all help from Diaspora organizations has been relevant or sustainable. Diaspora organizations have come and gone within a short time leaving behind crushed

expectations. The heterogeneity of Diaspora groups in terms of composition, political allegiances, personal ambitions, and other preferences has made it difficult to work for a common goal. There is a need to ensure active engagement of local civil societies in Diaspora supported initiatives. There is a strong potential for duplication as too many groups try to do the same thing. There are also serious questions regarding transparency and accountability.

This study has shown that, in the case of Ethiopia, Diaspora engagement for capacity building is possible, necessary and welcome. The emerging Diaspora organizations, discussed in Chapter 5, have shown the potential to be important players in Ethiopia's capacity building efforts. There is also, as shown in Chapter 6, a keen interest among Ethiopian civil society to work in partnership with Diaspora groups. The study has also identified some challenges that must be addressed.

Semantics Aside shows that we now need to move beyond awareness and commitment and start to build the right mechanisms to facilitate effective and sustainable Diaspora engagement. The newly emerging Diaspora organizations can be used as models. We need to learn from and build on their "good practices", benefit from the "lessons learned" and avoid the pitfalls. Once more, Diaspora engagement should not be left entirely to volunteers; nor can it be sustained solely with donations.

This study is limited in scope and findings. It does not, therefore, in any way, suggest that current efforts to stop or reverse the migration of skilled manpower out of Africa will not work. However, the search for different solutions must continue.

As a study focusing on the Diaspora, *Semantics Aside* recommends strongly that alternative solutions such as virtual participation be explored, supported and tried. In doing so, it is important to recognize that the African Diaspora is a key stakeholder. It is important for African governments, the United Nations (e.g. ECA, IOM, etc.), African bodies (e.g. African Union (AU), New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)) and non-governmental organizations to engage this population in the on-going dialogue and problem solving efforts. It is, therefore, important to make strategic investments to develop programs, mechanisms and institutions that will facilitate effective and sustainable Diaspora input towards the capacity building efforts of Africa.

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