

**REVERSING AFRICA'S BRAIN DRAIN:
THE AFRICARECRUIT INITIATIVE AND THE CHALLENGE TO
GOVERNMENTS, THE DIASPORA AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

Dr Mohan Kaul, CEO, Commonwealth Business Council

Few would dispute that shortage of skills is a critical constraint on investment, job creation and improved public services. This problem is most acute in Africa. Approximately 40% of all African professionals have left the continent's shores over the decades since decolonisation. This means that upwards of 5 million doctors, teachers, engineers, technicians and managers are living and working elsewhere. African immigrants to the United States, for example, boast some of the highest educational attainments of any immigrant group, and there are more than 250,000 scientists and physicians of African descent in the United States.

As a direct consequence of this skill loss, it has been estimated that the continent spends over \$4bn in technical assistance each year in sectors such as health, education and the environment, as well as public management.

This problem is seen as a major challenge by African's leaders. The African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) have identified the importance of diaspora to the continent's efforts to reinvigorate social, political and economic life for the betterment of its peoples. The aim is to find ways turn the historic phenomenon of the "brain drain" into a "brain gain" – utilising the experience and knowledge of the diaspora in the revitalisation of Africa. NEPAD aims to immediately reverse some of the "haemorrhaging" of Africa's best talent as a short-term measure to begin the process of building human capacity in Africa. Its medium term strategy is to ensure the skills attracted to Africa and those developed within Africa are retained. Long-term strategy is to address the development of the talents and careers and ensure that policies in place address the work force for the 21st Century.

But even meeting the first goal is an uphill task. As an example, in the health sector, many thousands doctors and nurses still leaving their native countries each year to work abroad, primarily in the UK and United States, leaving Africa's hospitals desperately short-staffed. The effects are dramatic: according to Kenya's Health Minister Charity Ngilu "out of 6,000 doctors trained in Kenya, our public hospitals had only about 600"

"I call on all Kenyans to work with my government to realise the enormous potential of this country. We invite all those who have been hounded out of our shores to come back home and join us in nation-building. Kenya needs the genius of its citizens wherever they are. It is time for healing, and we need every hand on deck"

H.E. Mwai Kibaki,

President of Kenya

Africa's Renewal and the Diaspora

The success of the African renewal initiative is closely linked to the availability of highly skilled person power, and Africa has a serious shortage of skilled person power in virtually all key areas set for the Millennium Development Goals. This is not a problem only in least developed countries, but also in countries like Botswana and South Africa.

African countries need nurses and medical doctors to extend access to health services for the poor; well-trained educators to ensure that primary education targets are met; agricultural extension officers and scientists to address hunger and food insecurity. Technicians and engineers are vital to energy, water and sanitation, transport and Information Communication Technology. Skilled person power is also required to meet the needs of the private sector, and entrepreneurs are required to ensure job creation. Professionals are vital to strengthen the capacity of government institutions to deliver public goods.

The huge number of Africa's professionals now living outside the continent naturally makes an engagement with the diaspora a key NEPAD objective. This requires fresh ideas on how to energise the relationship between diaspora communities, employers and governments. These professionals are some of Africa's greatest but least recognized resources. These communities retain strong ties back home, and their skills and talents are vital ingredients of the AU and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).

It is estimated that Africa receives approximately \$3 billion annually in remittances from Africans in the Diaspora through official or formal channels, with as much again through informal person to person transfers. In some countries remittances account for half of the national income. A recent survey of the African Diaspora carried out has shown the following:

- 75-80% of those surveyed did majority of their schooling in Africa
- Most had very little work experience in Africa before leaving the continent
- A majority intend to return back to Africa in the 0-7years
- Those who do not intend to return left because of insecurity and political reasons
- A majority of those surveyed live in Europe and North America
- A majority of those surveyed send money home to family averaging at US\$200 a month
- The money sent to family was mainly for consumption and personal responsibilities, and usually sent by hand or international money transfer.

But while it is possible to talk about numbers of African professionals, in the many millions, who live outside their country of birth each number, of course, represents a person, with a family, in a community - and there are many diaspora communities not

one. Numbers are huge and it would be wrong to try to simplify how people can assist the continent's renewal: Skills is one area, investment another, creating partnership business development yet another. It is important to listen to how best to access this resource, and provide practical ways in which people can contribute.

Practical Steps

“AfricaRecruit provides an opportunity for dialogue among relevant stakeholders on issues of concern to Africans living outside the continent. I am delighted to express my support for this initiative and urge Africans in the Diaspora as well as leaders of the private and public sector to do all they can to support it.”

President Olesegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Chairman, NEPAD Implementation committee.

Despite some setbacks in Africa's political progress, the growth of democratically elected governments, and improvement in political and economic governance in many countries has increased the interest of Africans in the diaspora to constructively engage. Many African governments themselves have taken the first steps to engage more constructively with their nationals abroad. Ghana has initiated a series of Home-Coming Summits that bring the Ghanaian Diaspora together with government officials and entrepreneurs. Sierra Leone has followed suit, and by Nigeria's President Obasanjo has appointed a Special Adviser on the Nigerian Diaspora and taken personal interest in encouraging the formation of a Nigerian Diaspora organisation, NIDOE (Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation Europe).

In order to take practical steps to reinforce this, the Commonwealth Business Council and NEPAD Secretariat have established AfricaRecruit to provide a platform for debate with the African Diaspora on how to contribute to an Africa-wide human resources/ skills strategy, and ensure that governments and employers work together to make skill transfer and employment opportunities easier to match. The African Union (AU) has expressed its appreciation for the initiative, which supports the AU's policies on the role and contribution of the diaspora.

“As part of our work over the past year with NEPAD, CBC turned to the critical issue of skills for Africa as our member companies told us that the lack of available managerial, technical and professional skills is a very practical constraint on investment and growth. Without the right skills, the jobs, wealth and improved social services envisaged by NEPAD cannot be created”

Cyril Ramaphosa, Chairman, Rebserve South African and CBC Board member

AfricaRecruit was launched by the Chairman of the NEPAD Steering Committee, Professor Wiseman Nkuhlu in London in March 2003. More than 3000 African professional attended the first event. Some of the practical outcomes include:

- Recruitment and relocation of Africans – over sixty job placements have been achieved as a result of the event
- Awareness of job opportunities and employment in Africa

- Recruiters sourcing from the large untapped “talent pool”
- Obstacles and challenges to employment in Africa highlighted with some practical and innovative solutions put forward
- Development of the African Diaspora market place - to date AfricaRecruit has 758 African Diaspora organizations on its database. The organizations vary widely and center around various capital such as financial; intellectual; political and intellectual capital

"Africa Recruit is an innovative service delivery vehicle with its focus on Africa's Human capital resource requirements, critical skills redirection and transfers required to build robust and enduring productive capacity throughout the continent. I commend the initiative to the private sector as a veritable tool to explore for its benefits."

Chief Oba Otudeko *Chairman Econet Wireless International, Principal Sponsor Global Skills Seminar for Africa, Nigeria December 2003*

The initiative aims to develop:

- a global data base of skilled African professionals/technocrats in and outside Africa
- strategic alliances with various global organisations such labour advisers, head-hunters, recruitment agencies, professional bodies and education institutions in mobilising skills for Africa
- to portalise jobs in Africa using a global platform (www.findajobinafrica.com)
- to facilitate and manage employers recruitment process through www.findajobinafrica.com by matching employers with the most appropriate recruitment agency
- To work in partnership with organised business in mobilising human resources for Africa.
- To create a platform to engage citizens of African in the formation of human resources policy

AfricaRecruit has thus set a number of key objectives.

First, to enable private and public sector African employers, and global companies with footprint in Africa, to work together to boost skills inflow into key managerial and technical areas.

Second, to create the largest interactive database of job seekers and job opportunities for Africa as a resource for companies and governments.

Third to foster debate in Africa and internationally with the African diaspora on how to contribute to an Africa-wide skills strategy - to change attitudes and perspectives, and to ensure that governments and employers work together to make skill transfer easier including opportunities to self employed Africans

The first AfricaRecruit event in Africa, the Global Skills Seminar for Africa will be held on the eve of GHOGM 2003, will take place in Lagos, Nigeria. The first US event, organised in cooperation with the Corporate Council on Africa will take place in Washington in 2004.

Challenges Ahead

Goodwill exists. Practical mechanisms are being established. Over 20,000 professionals are already registered on the data base. Already there are signs that Africa's diaspora is aware that the opportunities for engagement in Africa's renewal have never been better. But significant challenges remain to tapping the goodwill and resources of the diaspora.

Governments need to improve the enabling environment for immigration and employment to make return easier, and ensure that practice matches rhetoric. NEPAD and African governments need to work harder to improve mobility within Africa for African professionals coming from outside their country.

Addressing cultural, social and other barriers, and developing best practice among on the identification and retention of professionals from outside is important. This will require work between employers to share lessons, and identify the most important actions which government could take to make the labour market more flexible.

Finally, a more effective agreement or code of conduct with developed countries is required to limit the transfer of skilled personnel from Africa.

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