

## How to Attract Africa Diaspora Skills Back

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Every year Africans looking for *greener pastures* make the life-changing decision to leave their home countries in the search for a better life and better education. More often than not this group of migraters never returns back home. The World Bank estimates that the distribution of *Africans in the diaspora* is as follows across the continents: In North America, there are 39 million; 113 million in Latin America; 13.6 million in the Caribbean; and 3.5 million in Europe. A 2004 study investigated the skills and expertise of Zimbabweans living in the UK and in South Africa and found that 25% of Zimbabwean emigrants were trained doctors and nurses, and 70 to 90% of all Zimbabwean university graduates worked outside their country of origin.

In Africa, the loss of highly-skilled professionals to the developed world has become so serious that it has resulted in national, regional, and continent-wide efforts to address it. This loss has led to effects such as this which was revealed through a World Bank study which estimated that between 1994 and 1997 South Africa lost about 8.4 billion rand in tax earnings and 285,000 rand in GDP, due to emigration of its professionals. Another example, is back in 2000 the University of Ghana's medical school lost almost 50% of its teaching staff. This led to a lack of skilled physicians, and an inability to train sufficient numbers of future medical officers.

The return of expatriates to their home country is widely perceived as being beneficial (Ellerman, 2003). Skilled returnees' newly accrued skills, taste for innovation, and networks are clearly advantageous. Looking to the world, favorable impacts have been credited to returning scientists and engineers in Korea and China (Cervantes and Guellec, 2002). China encouraged its students to seek education abroad and now seeks to reap the rewards of their return. Taiwan's great advancement is also linked to its returning scientists and may well have served as one model for India's current information technology boom (Saxenian, 2001).

Johnson and Sedaca (2004) identify three specific advantages of having diasporans return home:

1. The use of volunteer return of expatriate professionals can free up substantial resources for other development needs
2. The transfer of knowledge occurs faster because less adjustment time is needed;
3. Expatriates' connections and interest in the homeland foster the creation of networks and follow-up mechanisms.

### Reasons for not returning

Some of the factors contributing to reluctance in returning are as follows:

- Threats to physical security

- Long-term commitments in the receiving country such as mortgages, education, and job prospects,
- Fear of being unable to leave again
- Unfavorable socioeconomic environment
- Policies which hinder them from conducting the business that they want to do
- Fear of persecution for leaving in the first place

The major driving factors which trump these reasons are that the return may be out of the person's control such as the emotional attachment to the homeland and the loss or failure to attain legal documents to remain in their host companies.

### *Attracting the diasporans back*

#### **1. Return policies/programmes**

These policies go beyond verbal appeals to patriotism and encompass concrete measures to provide attractive conditions for those who return. In Africa, the International Organisation for Migration's 'Return of Qualified African Nationals' programme encouraged about 100 nationals to return to their countries of origin every year between 1983 and 1999. These policies are usually accompanied by incentives for returning. However, incentives can also undermine those who stay at home. They feel that their loyalty goes unrewarded while returnees are offered lucrative packages.

Examples of such incentives include Thailand and Ireland which have reverse brain drain programs that offer generous research funding and monetary incentives, as well as services and assistance to attract medical professionals. Korea plans to put in place policies that foster strong R&D environments in order to lure back migrants who have been abroad for many years (Cervantes and Guellec, 2002). Other examples include government programs, such as China's industrial parks, that are aimed at attracting back entrepreneurs.

In the early 1990s, the People's Republic of China introduced a package of incentives for people to return and complemented it with penalties for not returning. Although it was not very successful in significantly increasing the number of people who came back, it reiterates the importance of having repatriates coming back (Lucas, 2004). Skilled workers, however, are more likely to return if the investment and employment climates in their home country improve (Ratha, 2003).

#### **2. Consider offering dual citizenship**

One of the main obstacles preventing members of the diaspora from returning is that, for a variety of reasons, a number of African countries do not allow dual-citizenship. This discourages Africans from coming home to "test the waters" prior to relocation, particularly as industrialised countries tend to limit the length of absence for their permanent residents.

#### **3. Create a good economic and working environment**

Creating an economic and professional climate that offers adequate remuneration and living conditions is key to attracting the diasporans. Korea's success at wooing back its citizens from abroad relied precisely on this approach. The country's current economic crisis, however, has led to a resurgence in the outflow of skilled labour, reiterating the importance of an attractive economic environment. The remuneration packages must be competitive with those they are already receiving.

#### **4. Offer opportunities for career progression and investment**

Skilled professionals in the Diaspora are recognizing the tremendous opportunities that exist in Africa and are repatriating home in greater numbers to fill top positions at multinational corporations and organizations on the continent. They are also investing in Africa's emerging markets and launching African-led businesses and enterprises to create well-needed jobs and spur economic growth. Africa needs to make it clear that opportunities for growth are available in order to attract the *diasporans* back.

#### **Conclusion**

Diasporas generate economic development in their homeland through various mechanisms. Other case studies demonstrate that, along with an increase in diasporans abroad, there is an increase in return tourism, expenditures on transportation and telecommunications, and trade. So diasporans offer advantages whether they are in the country or not. Whilst efforts to attract them back it must still be acknowledged that many diaspora Africans, for various reasons, are simply unwilling to relocate to back to Africa.

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