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# **The African Diaspora, Civil Society and African Integration**

Paul Opoku-Mensah

## **Abstract**

This paper, a work-in-progress, makes a contribution to the discussions on the appropriate modalities for incorporating the African diaspora in the African integration project. It argues that the most appropriate entry points for incorporating the African diaspora into the integration project might not, necessarily, be in the formal political structures, although this is important. To the contrary, the most effective and sustainable might be within civil society--- that is the links between the peoples and organizations of Africa and the diaspora. Using the case of the African academy-- as an institution of civil society--- the paper outlines a conceptual framework for incorporating the diaspora into the African integration project.

## **Introduction**

Two schools, the continentalists and globalists, have traditionally framed the discussions on African integration. While the continentalists conceive of African integration as a process involving the union of the political units that make up the African continent, the globalists, on the other hand, conceive African integration as involving Africans on the continent, and in the Diaspora. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU), established in 1963 as the institutional architecture and framework for promoting African integration adopted a continental approach, conceiving African integration in purely geographic terms, largely conflating it with the integration of Africa states, excluding the Diaspora. The establishment of the African Union (AU) in 2002 has significantly shifted the terms of debating Africa's integration, with the globalists framing the discourse and conceiving the process as one involving Africa and its diaspora.

This shift in conception was given practical expression in a change to the constitutive act of the African Union (AU) in February 2003 to include the participation of the African diaspora in the activities of the AU, and in the processes of African integration. While this change fell short of formally recognizing the diaspora as the sixth region of the AU, it does nonetheless provide the legal backing and practical expression to the historical need to link the continent to its diaspora, and adds a sense of urgency to organized efforts to develop a durable partnership between Africa and its diaspora. In another sense, the AU's decision can be regarded as a needed corrective to what might legitimately be described as a historical injustice given that the African diaspora that was the original source of the inspiration for the integration project but was completely left out by the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Irrespective of how one interprets this action of the AU, one thing is clear. It has given practical expression and momentum to the need to develop mutually beneficial and functional linkages between Africa and its diaspora, as an integral part of the process of integration (Opoku-Mensah, 2006).

This, in turn, has led to the development of a number of important initiatives at the political level that serve to further institutionalise Africa-Diaspora relations, including:

- I. Amendment of Constitutive Act to include Article 3q that calls for the participation of the diaspora in the activities of AU.
- II. The establishment of the Western Hemisphere African Diaspora Network (WHADN), the brainchild and outcome of the AU Western Hemisphere African Diaspora Forum held in Washington DC between December 17 and 19, 2002.

- III. The AU technical meeting on relations with the diaspora, held in Trinidad and Tobago June 2-4, 2004.
- IV. The first and Second Conferences of Intellectuals of Africa and the Diaspora (CIAD I & II) organised by the AU in Senegal (October 2004) and Brazil (July 2006) respectively, and
- V. A series of regional consultative meetings being organised across the globe in preparation for a Africa Union-African Diaspora summit in South Africa in 2008. The Summit, whose theme is “Towards the realization of a united and integrated Africa and its Diaspora: A shared vision for sustainable development to address common challenges,” ultimately seeks to produce a practical program of action for co-operation between Africa and its Diaspora.

While these are welcome developments, they also do raise questions relating to the diaspora and its relations to the integration project. How can the African diaspora effectively play a meaningful role in the Africa integration project? This paper argues that the fuzziness of the diaspora concept, and the diversity of the African diaspora experience, makes it problematic to incorporate the diaspora at the level of the formal political structures of the AU. A more sustainable basis for linking the African diaspora is within the framework of an alternative people-centred conception of African integration that focuses on civil society and African Integration. That is, a conception that focuses on the integration of, and strengthened links between, African civil society institutions, and diaspora institutions. Using the African academy as an example, the paper outlines a framework for such civil society linkages.

The paper is structured as follows: following the introduction is a brief overview of the debates on the African diaspora, focusing on its definition and profile. This is followed by a discussion of the historical and functional arguments for incorporating the diaspora into the African integration project in general, and the African Union in particular. The next section discusses the current attempts by the African Union to secure the participation of the diaspora in the Integration project. Arguing that the formal political structures of the African Union are inadequate for this participation of the diaspora, the section proposes an alternative, civil society, conception of African Integration that provides a sustainable basis for incorporating the diaspora. Within this conception, the focus is on the integration of African peoples and their organizations rather than the integration of formal political institutions. Using the case of the African academy -- as an institution of civil society--- the paper then discusses the modalities through which the African diaspora can be incorporated into the African integration project. Specifically the paper outlines a conceptual

framework for incorporating the African diaspora into the African academy that has two dimensions, firstly, the level where the diaspora is incorporated as a *unit of analysis* in continental higher education institutions. That is, the level at which the roles of the African diaspora and its issues are part of the curriculum and research agenda of African Higher Education institutions. The second level of the framework relates to the integration of the diaspora as *actors* in the African academy. This relates to the level where researchers, institutions and students in the diaspora actually participate in the activities of the higher education sector in Africa. The paper concludes that although the practical aspects of such incorporation of the diaspora will have to be worked out in detail, the historical precedent and the functional necessity for these linkages exist.

### *Defining, and Classifying the African Diaspora*

While the AU has re-introduced the concept of “African diaspora” into the public discourse and policy discussions on African integration in a seemingly unproblematic way, the concept is neither unproblematic nor uncontested. Indeed it remains one of the under theorized topics within the integration discussions. Like the concept of civil society, the term diaspora is very flexible and all encompassing. Paradoxically, while this very all-encompassing nature gives the term its functional utility, it also renders it analytical imprecise and practically almost impossible to act with, as it means different things to different people.

Historically, the concept has initially been approached primarily as a historical artefact of the Atlantic slave trade that is used to refer to the forced dispersal of African peoples in the Atlantic world, especially in the western hemisphere. Although the term ‘diaspora’ historically has been used as a term for “traumatic migrations”, until the 1960s it had not applied to the African situation but rather confined to the scholarship of the Jewish and Christian religions. The first usage of the term to the African situation was by George Sheperson in a paper presentation in 1965 at the congress of African history held at the University of Dar-es-Salaam titled “The African Abroad or the African Diaspora.” In this presentation, Sheperson acknowledged what he saw as the close parallels between the Jewish diaspora and the dispersal of Africans as a consequence of the slave trade. In his usage, Sheperson was clear that not all African migrations could be subsumed under this rubric, restricting the concept of the African diaspora to that “which is the study of a series of reactions to coercion, to the imposition of the economic and political rule of alien peoples in Africa, to slavery and imperialism.” He did, however, include within the African diaspora “the migration of Negro slaves and servants to Europe before the opening of the trans-Atlantic slave trade’ and “the enslavement of Negroes by Muslim powers.” Nevertheless, he asserted that “the period of almost four hundred years of the

European enslavement of Africans remains the heart of the African diaspora.” He further extended his definition of what was properly within the orbit of the African diaspora to include “the dispersal of Africans . . .inside [Africa], both as a consequence of the slave trade and of imperialism (Alpers, 2001).

A number of scholars have applied Sheperson’s ideas, extending the concept to the notion of the wider dispersal of Africans across the globe. The most enduring of these contributions, however, remains Joseph Harris (1993) who made the first clear attempt to define the diaspora beyond Sheperson’s original boundaries to include the voluntary component of the African diaspora:

The African Diaspora concept subsumes the following: the global dispersion (voluntary and involuntary) of Africans throughout history; the emergence of a cultural identity abroad based on origin and social condition; and the psychological or physical return to the homeland, Africa. Thus viewed, the African Diaspora assumes the character of a dynamic, continuous, and complex phenomenon stretching across time, geography, class, and gender. (Alpers, 2001:8).

This definition of the diaspora still continues to provide the general frame for the discussions on Africa-diasporic relations. However, this seemingly general acceptance of the boundaries of Harris definition does not indicate that the application of the diaspora to the African situation has not been contended. Indeed a vibrant body of literature has accumulated on the topic, with a number of contributions contending, and in some instances even negating the application of the concept to the African experience (See Alpers, 2001). In one such contribution, the Garvey scholar Tony Martin actually calls for a complete cessation of the use of the concept of diaspora to the African experience on the grounds that its continuous usage reinforces a tendency to see the history of African people always in terms of parallels in white history. Consequently he suggests the use of alternative terminology like the African dispersion, or uprooted Africa, or scattered Africa (ibid).

Despite Martin’s call, the diaspora terminology is still in general usage, albeit in the context of continuous attempts at refining and clarifying it. In a recent attempt at such clarification, Molefi Asante (2004) argues that to be a member of the diaspora it is essential that one demonstrates a Pan African solidarity with the world African community, a desire for the revitalization of Africa, a consciousness of victory, and some accountability to the objectives of African renaissance.

By and large the definition of the diaspora as a migration of African peoples (forced and voluntary) remains uncontested, as current efforts are now expended largely in profiling the African diaspora. Such profiling indicates a growth in



the number and resources of the diaspora. For instance according to the 2000 United States census, there are 34,658,190 African-Americans in the United States. Of the 35 million people that claimed Hispanic heritage in the 2000 US census, at least one third are likely to have African ancestry. Nearly 1.8 million people from the Caribbean lived in the United States in 2000. About 0.6% of all people living in United States (1,781,877) identified themselves as Sub-Saharan Africans. Conservatively, in the United States alone, at least 50 million individuals have African ancestry. Most people in the Caribbean and significant proportions of individuals in Latin America have African ancestry. The International Office of Migration (IOM), a United Nations agency, estimates that the African diaspora population in France is 1,633,142 and another 1.5 million diasporan Africans live in other European countries.

The IOM also provides a picture of an affluent diasporan Africans. About 22 per cent of diasporan Africans are in the teaching, education and research professions; 20 per cent in finance, investments and economics; 20 per cent in public health; 15 per cent in engineering; per cent in agriculture; 5 per cent in information technology; 5 per cent in legal sciences; 3 per cent in administration, and; 1 per cent in natural sciences. The 2000 US census indicates that foreign-born Sub-Saharan Africans (recent immigrants) have the highest proportion of foreign-born individuals 25 years and over who have bachelors degrees (49.3 per cent) compared to Europe (32.9 per cent) and Asia (44.9 per cent). At least 38.2 per cent of Sub-Saharan householders in the US own their own homes. The average median household income of foreign-born households headed by Sub-Saharan Africans was \$36,371, according to the 2000 US census. For the period 2000 through 2002, the median household income for African Americans was \$29,483 according to the US Census. Home-ownership for African Americans was 48% in 2003. Black-owned business in 1997, the latest period for which data is available, employed 718,300 persons and generated US\$71 billion in revenues, according to the US Census.

Remittances by Africans in the diaspora to their countries of origin are substantial. According to the IOM, Nigerians in the diaspora remitted US\$1.3 billion in 1999, equivalent to 3.7 per cent of the country's GDP and 55 per cent of overseas development assistance. Remittances from diasporan Africans that identify Eritrea as their country of origin, accounted for 19.7 per cent of the country's GDP and a staggering 85.8 per cent of the overseas development assistance. It is important to note that these remittances do not include informal transactions that may be higher than data in official records.

*The Diaspora and African Integration: Between History and Functional Necessity*

While the definition and profile serves to establish the reality of the diaspora, they do not themselves justify the inclusion of the diaspora in the integration project. To find the justification, there is the need to historicise the integration project itself. In such an exercise, Kwesi Prah argues that the very notion of African unity and integration is a diaspora construct:

The roots of the idea of African Unity are buried in the mid-nineteenth century. Together and enmeshed with the related ideas of nationalism and pan-Africanism, they emerged as the articulate response of people of African descent in Africa and its diaspora to the continuing experience of western domination and exploitation. (Prah, 2000:2).

He is emphatic that the primary reason for the emergence of the idea of African integration was and is:

The diasporal inspiration forged out of the alienation from the continent, the detribalisation and homogenisation of Africans taken across the Atlantic, and their longing and reference for what is captured in spirit by Aimé Césaire's extended poem (1939) called Notes on a Return to the Native Country (ibid).

A direct route of the diaspora to African Integration, and the inauguration of the African Union in July 2002, is given by Thabo Mbeki, who in an address at the University of the West Indies argues that:

...the stirrings and fermentation of the notions of decolonisation and freedom on the African continent were significantly inspired by the courageous pioneers of African freedom in the Diaspora. It was in the year 1900 when the Trinidadian barrister Henry Sylvester Williams initiated the first Pan-African conference, in London. That conference was seminal to the political and philosophical movement of Pan-Africanism throughout the world, the catalyst that has ultimately led to the formation of the African Union, at the beginning of the 21st century (Mbeki, 2003: 4).

This initiative of the diaspora, and the inspiration it gave to the freedom fighters on the continent, he argues, was the decisive factor in the final onslaught against colonial domination on the African continent:

The 1945 5th Pan-African Congress in Manchester, England which featured anti-colonial thinkers and activists such as George Padmore and W.E.B. Du Bois, again impacted on the young African freedom fighters and intellectuals such as Kwame Nkrumah, and gave sustenance to the struggles which finally saw the realisation of the process of African independence and freedom that started with the liberation of Ghana (ibid).

Finally, Julius Ihovnbere calls for a “full acknowledgment” of the contributions of the African diasporic communities to the cause of African unity and liberation, arguing that the African diaspora has been in the forefront of continental Africa’s struggle for independence from the forces of western imperialism, and the subsequent quest for nationhood and unity (Ihovnbere 1994).

From the discussions above, then, the justification to link the continent and its diaspora in the current integration project is historical. The diaspora has played leading historical roles and these roles must be acknowledged and incorporated in the current process. The historical justification, although legitimate, has not always provided a basis for the incorporation of the diaspora in integration efforts. To be sure, a number of individual and ad-hoc initiatives have always been there, but the initiative has come from the diaspora, and until recently, these have been rebuffed by those in the continent (Zezeza, 2002).

A recent shift from just a focus on historical bonds to a more functional justification for the incorporation of the diaspora into the integration process has shifted the terms of engagement. In deed from a historical and emotional justification for the engagement, one of capacity utilisation currently shapes the debate and serves as the legitimating strategy for the involvement of the diaspora. Within the terms of the new debate, the inclusion of the diaspora is not only seen in terms of the need for a historic reconnection but also, and increasingly more importantly, as a historical mobilization of the resources in the service of the development of the Africa. In other words, a response to the challenge of finding the most effective ways to fully exploit the resources scattered all over the world in support of Africa’s development.

This of course does not mean the complete negation of the historical justification for the linkage. But in the current discussions, functional linkages are ascribed primacy, and explained as a function of the evolution of the diaspora itself. For instance, Howard Jeter, the former US Ambassador to Nigeria in a presentation at the Nigerian Institute for International Affairs identifies three distinct stages, historically anchored in the evolution of the African diaspora relations. The first stage, the survival and freedom stage, chronicles the individual struggle by slaves to win personal and institutional freedom to live a life of respect and dignity while engaging in back-breaking labour in the West. The second stage is the civil rights struggle in the diaspora and the struggle for political independence from in Africa, which heralded a new era of legal protection for Africans in the diaspora and the right for indigenous political aspirations of Africans after centuries of years of colonial rule. The third, and current, stage of the Africa-diaspora relationship is the era of organized and institutional cooperation and collaboration. Any attempt to give primacy to the first or

second stages of Africa-diaspora relationships in today's efforts to develop a durable partnership is bound to fail. The first and second stages of the Africa-diaspora relationship should serve as an inspiration to focus on the hard work needed to organize and institutionalize the mechanics of a durable partnership. In this functional conception of the relations, the main emphasis is not on the diaspora as a historical reality, but more as a political and economic resource that can be mobilised and utilised for the development of Africa, and the African diaspora as well.

Although current efforts, and the AU's decision is based on a dualistic understanding of the relations, in practice the emphasis has been put more on the instrumental nature of the relations—as a resource to be used in Africa's development—than as a historical reality that needs to be reconnected culturally and politically to the continent. This in itself reflects the current (second) wave of integration, which is largely premised on the need for economic rather than political independence. It is in the context of the need for such functional and institutional links that the debate on the diaspora and the Integration project is currently conducted, and the specific policy initiatives are developed.

#### *African Integration and the Diaspora: The Challenge of Incorporation*

The question for the need to develop sustainable relations between the diaspora and has gained momentum following the AU's formal decision to include the diaspora in its activities. The question after this formal decision has been how to incorporate the diaspora into the African Integration process. The discussions on the incorporation of the diaspora have taken place mainly under the aegis of the AU, with the aim of developing a truly global AU. Concrete initiatives in this respect have been established, beginning with the inclusion of diaspora representatives in two major OAU-Civil Society Conferences on 11-14 June 2001 and 11-15 June 2002 respectively as part of the process of transforming the OAU into the AU. Indeed the genesis of the current efforts at incorporating the diaspora took place at the second Conference in 2002, which focused on the contribution of the Civil Society to the establishment of the African Union, and which included diaspora representatives. That Conference also elected a Provisional Working Group to work with the AU Commission on a continuous basis in between larger assemblies to be held on bi-annual basis. The diaspora was given two representatives on this working Group - one for Europe and one for the Western Hemisphere including the US and other parts of the Americas.

Following its formal inauguration the AU has sought to establish a framework through which the African diaspora would be mainstreamed in the activities of the new AU. For instance the AU Commission made plans to launch AU Diaspora Forums in Europe and the Western Hemisphere. Consequently, the First AU-Western Hemisphere Diaspora Forum was convened in Washington

DC from 17-19 December 2002. The Forum began the process of institutional linkage between the African diaspora and Continental Africans in an effort to establish the Union project as a truly global African effort. As a result of this initial meeting, a Western Hemisphere Diaspora Network (WHADN) was established to interface with the AU Commission in this regard and the Network set up permanent working groups made up of Experts and Resource persons in each area. The Working Group has put up proposals for effective collaboration in each of these domains. These proposals have been refined by the Commission in consultation with the nascent WHADN Secretariat to allow for effective programme support and to feed into the policy demands of the Commission. The Network has also decided on the establishment of an AU Education Endowment Fund and an AU Trade and Economic Development Forum for the US diaspora and agreed on a series of measures for contribution to these funds including elements of salary deductions.

By far the most important and far reaching measure taken by the AU on the incorporation of the diaspora took place at the Extra-Ordinary Summit of the Assembly of Heads of States and Governments held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on February 3, 2003 to deliberate on proposed amendments to the Constitutive Act. At the meeting of the Executive Council that preceded the Summit, Senegal proposed an amendment to formally integrate the diaspora in the policy framework of the Union. The proposed amendment was refined and adopted by the Summit in a new Article 3 (q) that would "invite and encourage the full participation of the African diaspora as an important part of our continent, in the building of the African Union". The amendment constitutes a milestone in the bid to incorporate the diaspora into the policy making and policy support processes of the AU. In a further demonstration of commitment, the AU has allocated the Diaspora representation in the Economic Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC). Of a total of 150 civil society organisations allocated representation, 20 of these must come from the African Diaspora.

While these activities have forcefully thrust the diaspora into the policy discussions on African integration, a careful examination indicates that the formal structures of the AU remain inadequate to effectively mobilize the African diaspora.

First the sheer heterogeneity of the Diaspora makes it impossible for the 20 seats allocated to the Diaspora by the AU to adequately cater to all of them. Indeed while the AU makes reference to the African "Diaspora", in reality what exists is not a homogenous Diaspora, but a heterogeneous set of African Diasporas spread across the globe. Africa's Diasporas can be found in Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, North America, the Pacific, South America, and Brazil which has the largest concentration of Africans outside the African continent. In

sum a worldwide dispersal of Africans whose representation cannot be satisfactorily catered for within the structures of the African Union.

Second, and most important, the initiatives of the AU to link the diaspora are based on a historically flawed conceptualisation of the process of integration. Such a conception assumes that integration occurs solely at the political level. This is problematic, as conceptually the process of integration has to be understood as a dialectical unity of social, cultural (people-to-people), economic and political processes.

Such an understanding of the process of integration renders the current initiatives to link the Diaspora problematic, as it assumes the AU to be the originator and implementer of the Integration project. The historical evidence exemplified by successful integration projects elsewhere—and even by the history of the OAU---indicates that this is not a viable option. In successful integration projects, while the formal political structures remain important, the actual integration is achieved at the level of civil society: that is the linkages between peoples and their organisations. Such integration has taken place in collaboration with, but sometimes in disregard of, the formal political structures and processes.

The implications for the African Integration process, and the incorporation of the diaspora in this process, are obvious: the incorporation of the African diaspora in the African integration project should of necessity not be limited to the formal political structures of the AU. Conceptually this means a reframing of the current discourse away from the formal political processes to a focus on civil society as the locus of African integration. Within this conception, the focus is on the integration of African peoples and their organizations rather than the integration of formal political institutions. In practice, this means a search for the most effective organizations of civil society capable of implementing the integration agenda, including the incorporation of the diaspora.

In such an exercise the role of the African academy, as part of civil society, becomes especially important due to its historical roles, and current relevance to the integration project.

#### *Civil Society, the African Academy, African Integration and the Diaspora*

The African academy provides an excellent entry point for implementing a civil society conception of the integration project. As Mbeki reminds us, the impetus and the momentum for the first wave of African integration was the result of the meeting of minds, in fact driven by a partnership of intellectuals in Africa and the African diaspora (Mbeki, 2003 and 2005). The historical basis for such a role by the African academy thus exists. Second, the functional necessity exists.

More than other sectors, the African academy has been the most affected by the massive exodus, the brain drain of intellectuals from Africa (El-Nur, 2004). An important means of mitigating the negative effects of this brain drain is to find the most effective ways to fully exploit this intellectual and technical capacity that is now scattered all over the world through links between African and its diaspora (Zezeza, 2002). As Mbeki put it:

Our intelligentsia in Africa and the Diaspora has the choice to join hands to bless Africa with a generation's creative genius that discovers its mission, fulfils it to its best, without betraying, diminishing, reducing or downsizing it - the mission to achieve Africa's integration and renaissance. (Mbeki, 2004:2).

Such a “joining of hands,” to be sure, will be a contribution to the integration of the continent and lend support to the current efforts by the African union. But it will also give concrete expression to the need to promote an alternative civil society centered conception of the integration project that complements the formal political processes. In deed one of the lessons of integration projects elsewhere is the extent to which higher education institutions have under girded the projects by exchanges that have solidified regional identities, as in the European Union (EU). The integration of the knowledge sphere in Africa, therefore, will create a cohort of Africans alive to the idea of African unity and who will support the process even in the face of weaknesses in the formal political structures.

The challenge lies then in the development of concrete institutional modalities for such incorporation of the African diaspora in the African Academy. The discussions below outline a framework for such integration of the diaspora. More specifically, the framework proceeds on the assumption that the integration of the African diaspora in the African Academy can be achieved at two conceptual levels, namely a) the level at which the African diaspora becomes an *object* of analysis, and b) the level at which the diaspora is incorporated as an *actor* in the African academy.

### **i) The African Diaspora as a Unit of Analyses for Continental Research and Training**

One of the mitigating factors hindering the communion of the diaspora and continental African is the continuous misperception of, and complete lack of knowledge, on the African diaspora by African institutions of higher education. Indeed the diaspora and its contributions to the African unity project are hardly documented and disseminated. While African studies exist in virtually all foreign universities worldwide, hardly any university in Africa has a research and teaching focus on the African diaspora. A first step then is to bridge these gaps in knowledge through a conscious integration of the African diaspora into

the curriculum of institutions of Higher Education in Africa. A way to begin is to incorporate African diaspora studies in the specialized African Studies institutes, thus conceptually inserting the diaspora in the public consciousness.

At the level of research, the diaspora should be on the agenda of African universities. Indeed the very notion/concept of African diaspora itself is largely under theorized and needs to be interrogated by the African academy. Similarly fundamental issues affecting the diaspora and its roles, including issues as the right of the diaspora to African citizenship would need to be addressed, if African Unity is to make headway (Prah, 2002). The incorporation of the African diaspora in the integration project requires that these roles are interrogated by African Higher Education institutions. Analytically, this level represents the first point at which the African diaspora can be integrated into the African academy.

### **ii) The Diaspora as an Actor in the African Academy**

The second level at which the diaspora can be incorporated is at the level of participation in the research and teaching activities of Higher Education institutions in Africa . This in a sense the level at which the developments at the intellectual and knowledge creation level mimics current developments at the political level. Specifically, where parallel processes of involving diaspora actors by the AU are replicated at the knowledge sphere. Beyond the obvious historical justification for the involvement at this level, the main consideration should be a pragmatic acknowledgement of the capacity of the diaspora to contribute to knowledge production on the continent. This implies a conceptual leap from the focus on brain drain to brain utilization. That is, the mobilization of the existing intellectual capacity outside the continent in the service of knowledge production on the continent. This of course does not mean that the involvement of the diaspora in the African academy is new. To the contrary, it exists. For instance the African Association of Political Science (AAPS) has always had a representative of the African diaspora on its Executive Committee. What is new, and what is stressed, is that this should be a conscious strategy, and contribution of the African academy to the integration project, and involve institutionalised rather than ad-hoc processes.

Such an integration of the diaspora as actors can be done within the research and teaching domains of the African academy. At the level of research, opportunities exist, or could be created for mutually beneficial relations between African universities and the African diaspora. All too often such research exchanges have ignored the African diaspora. There is therefore a need for a conscious and aggressive policy of collaborative research exchanges between African universities and diaspora scholars as a means for generating knowledge for the African integration project; as well as addressing the capacity gaps of



African universities. Joint publications offer another such route for such exchanges. The publications, in particular, in Africa based journals offer an avenue for conversation between the African diaspora and the African academy, and facilitates the integration process.

These research links provide a link to exchanges within the teaching domain, which could also help address the perennial teaching problems of continental African universities, as well as train a new generation of Africans supportive of the Integration project. The ICT revolution means that such teaching exchanges need not be physical, but virtual. Summer research graduate schools provide such an opportunity for such training links. Similarly periodic teaching appointments by diaspora Africans in African Institutions of Higher Education offer such opportunities for these linkages. The rapid development of ICT's means this need not be an entirely expensive proposition. Such research and teaching linkages could automatically develop into the areas of curriculum development in ways that contribute to the advancement of research and development in Africa, and facilitate the integration of the continent.

To be sure, these are already being done on an ad-hoc basis. What this paper argues is the need, and urgency, to formalise these practices as part of a comprehensive strategy of the African academy to facilitate the African integration project, including the linking of the African diaspora.

## **Conclusion**

To succeed, the creative heart of the African Integration project must move, conceptually and practically, out of the ambit of African states into civil society (Prah, 2006; Opoku-Mensah, 2007). By its very nature, the African academy potentially provides the infrastructure for such a civil-society conception of the process of African integration, which complements the formal political processes. This is more so at the level of integrating the African diaspora. What this paper has sought to do is to provide a historical and contemporary background to the roles of the diaspora in the integration process. Similarly, it has sought to provide the rationale and modalities for the incorporation of the diaspora. To be sure these are simply modalities, and concrete aspects will have to be worked out in detail. But as African higher education institutions seek to study as well as demonstrate and facilitate the process of African integration, perhaps it might be well to say the African academy really has no choice in this matter. The historical and contemporary realities have placed the African diaspora at the heart of the integration process. As an actor that seeks to study and promote this process, involving the diaspora becomes an affirmation of its own vision. In effect, the challenge is for the African academy to live up to its own vision of African integration articulated at the Conference of Rectors, Vice

Chancellors and Presidents (COREVIP) of the Association of African Universities (AAU) in Mauritius from the 17th to 21st March, 2003. Organized under the theme, “The Role of African Higher Education Institutions in the Building of the African Union”, the COREVIP argues in a memorandum to the AU that an important measure of the success of the AU’s efforts at African Integration is “...*the extent to which students and scholars can move freely in Africa*” (AAU, 2003).

The challenge then is for the African academy to extend this vision to include the African diaspora. Specifically, it means answering the question posed by the African union:

Is there no urgency in ensuring that intellectuals of Africa and the diaspora, who are today fragmented and scattered, come together as a veritable intelligentsia by turning their struggle into the struggle for transformation and liberation of the Continent? (AU 2004:1-2)

To the extent that the African academy succeeds in answering in the affirmative, it will be contributing to this historical process of linking the continent and its diaspora, a link which is critical to the development and integration of the continent. Additionally, it will also be contributing to a much needed conceptual shift that moves the African integration project from the control of political elites, to the level where it captures the imagination, and ultimately becomes a project of, African peoples and their organizations.

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