

CHAPITRE 6

Unleashing the Forces of the Diaspora Capitalizing on Brain Drain in the Era of Information and Communication Technologies

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Introduction

The movement of scholars from one country to another is known by numerous synonyms – Brain drain, brain hemorrhage, and also as brain circulation (Teferra, 2000). The controversy over the concept has been such that some refute concerns over the issue as emotional nationalistic nonsense (Das, 1974) while others urge for a serious commitment by some developing countries, particularly Africa, to staunch the serious outflow of their trained personnel (Sattaur, 1989). While one school of thought treats such movements as an extreme form of institutional nomadism (Hountondjii, 1990) another views it as a circulation of skilled labor in the emerging interdependent global economy (North, 1992).

The causes of migration – be it regional or international – are a result of complex phenomenon. The motivation of scholars to migrate or their decisions to stay abroad is a product of a complex blend of economic, political, social, cultural, and psychological factors. The impact and chemistry of each factor varies from country to country and individual to individual and fluctuates with time – even for the same individual (Teferra, 2000).

While many developing countries and major regional, international, and non-governmental organizations have tried to stem massive one-way movements of experts the results have been however disappointing. Even though various attempts have been made to stem the brain drain, efforts are rarely made to tap the expertise of immigrant communities at their new places of residence. As communication technology is slowly expanding across Africa and physical distance is becoming a less serious obstacle, an active policy of tapping and mobilizing the remotely stationed intellectual capital and vital resource of migrated nationals needs to be given more emphasis (Teferra, 2000).

Social upheavals, political instabilities, economic uncertainties, real and perceived persecutions, and poor working and living conditions are the most common factors triggering migration. Many developing countries, especially, African countries are yet to rid themselves of these economic, social, and political hurdles that drive away many of their highly qualified and trained experts.

In an increasingly globalized labor market, developing countries as a whole and, indeed, many industrialized countries have sought to minimize the migration of talent. These efforts have largely been unsuccessful. Migration from poorer to wealthier countries is commonplace, as is migration from smaller and less cosmopolitan academic systems to larger and more central systems. At present, there is a small exodus from the United Kingdom to the United States and several other countries because of lower academic salaries in Britain. The international migration of highly educated people is by no means limited to developing countries. It is a worldwide and perhaps unprecedented phenomenon currently (Teferra and Altbach, 2003).

This article would not be directly drawn into the mobility debate at length. It however, strongly underscores the possibility and need for countries and governments to ensure that their professionals and experts – and their Diaspora community as a whole – be tapped and exploited *wherever* they reside to contribute to and participate in the national development of home country. This particularly makes a strong case given the various unsuccessful – governmental and non-governmental – policy efforts to stem the tide of human capital movement from developing to developed countries. One issue has proven to be difficult for the success of the various policies: the mobility of human capital is rather fluid whose variables are as complex as they are numerous.

The movement of capital, goods, knowledge, and information has seen an unprecedented growth and expansion with unparalleled speed in the last decades. The effects of economic, social, and political chaos propagate across the world instantaneously creating havoc in its wake – with particularly massive blow on unwitting and helpless nations, regions, and constituencies across the globe. And yet – in sharp contrast, however, the speed in which economic prosperity, social and political stability and success from one region to another and its contagion effect is remarkably fraught with inertia. The movement of human capital in this complex scenario, as much as it is crucial, to both developing and developed countries, has not yet received the visibility it deserves like the rest such as the movement of financial capital, goods, and information.

It is now a cliché to state that we live in an information era. In this era, probably more than any other before us, we know that human capital plays a rather critical and crucial role in the economic, social, and political success and competitiveness of a nation. We have come to learn therefore that the unregulated and massive movement of this capital – as a powerful force of development – has had significant impact on the development of both the receiving and sending nations. It will be particularly interesting not just to determine the pattern and trend of human capital movement but capture its social, economic, political, and cultural dynamics.

The Conceptual Framework: The Shifting Grounds

The very concept brain drain was conceived and coined revolves around physical movement, physical mobility, flow, distance, and location. The variables around which the concept was conceived have seen major shifts making physical distance and location less significant entities. Mobility and flow variables have also seen major shifts. The development and transformation of information and communication technologies (ICT) have conquered the barriers upon which distance, location, and mobility were premised. ICT have created immense possibilities in human capital movement and mobilization. Instantaneous communication, increasingly declining cost of communication, a multitude of communication possibilities – (such as video conferencing, real-time communication, electronic mailing list, discussing groups, usenet and newsgroups, electronic bulletin boards, online databases) have diminished the impact of distance and opened a world of opportunities. The essence of virtual communication has emerged as a promising avenue of “undraining the brain” as well as an opportunity for harnessing human capital.

So physical distance – upon which brain drain is premised – has lost some of its luster by the unprecedented developments. Experts can now communicate across borders with little difficulties. Research projects are conceived, launched, and implemented from different locations by researchers who are based in institutions world apart. Meetings and conferences can take place in real time thanks to electronic conferencing, such as videoconferencing. As a matter of fact, such delicate and elaborate tasks as medical operations on a patient’s bed in a hospital takes place by a team of medical doctors world apart through this technology. Highly sought after experts give lectures over long distance imparting their knowledge, skills, and expertise to students and colleagues unimpeded by distance and location and time. Notwithstanding communications barriers in technology, infrastructure, and policy of a nation, distance and location are losing their impact significantly in the context of brain drain.

Given the unprecedented developments in ICT, the concept upon which “critical mass” was conceptualized, also needs to be reexamined. Critical mass as a nuclei to stir growth and development can now take a form without a particular physical destination. A critical mass of a certain discipline or action need not be based or aggregated on one particular physical site. The “invisible colleges” that function across and beyond institutions, universities, organizations and national boundaries have flourished and diversified. The Diaspora communities can effectively simulate the essence of the invisible colleges and what they can and have achieved. It is the case that while the social, economic, cultural, and organizational framework of both (the “invisible colleges” and the Diaspora) communities exist and operate, may be somewhat comparably, variations however abound. Simply, the power balance, the emotional and psychological dimensions between the two are not on the same plane field.

We talk about the need for critical mass of experts for development to take place either at institutional or national level. A critical mass need not be established – on a particular site – to initiate and foster capacity building. The idea of critical mass presupposes space and distance; the power of distance and space as impeding variables has diminished significantly. It needs to be clearly acknowledged however that virtual communication cannot supplant presence of experts in one physical space; the attempt here is to amplify the situation to make a point.

If distance and location have become less formidable and less relevant to the essence of mobility, the next strategy is to carefully and thoroughly examine how Diaspora and the non-

Diaspora alike can effectively function in the current state of affairs to contribute to home country development in particular, and their host country and themselves in general.

Mobility Trend of Highly Qualified Individuals

Trends of mobility have their own paradigms manifested at three levels: National, regional, and international. Movement, mobility, and flow of highly trained expertise occur with in national borders, with in regions, and outside regions, i.e. internationally. The changes that were stated earlier affect each of the three areas in their own peculiar ways and the three levels are classified below on the basis of physical movement for discussion.

Mobility in the national borders: The reality and the possibility

The implications of internal mobility inside a national border have not garnered serious attention by experts who debate on brain drain. Some terming it as an internal bleeding, it is also a cause for concern particularly with regard to higher education and other national research institutions.

Higher education and research institutions in most developing countries face numerous challenges. Low and declining wages, poor funding, escalating enrollment, declining quality, limited or non-existent research undertakings are the common phenomena. As a consequence working and living conditions of the faculty have declined significantly. The research recounts a common phenomenon – called moonlighting – in which many professors are engaged in second and even third jobs to meet ends that consequently force them to neglect their main professional duties.

Many of these particular problems are well within the reach of national governments to address them, if they wish to do so. Salary increase, improving working environment, and ensuring academic freedom are within the grips of national governments. Such proactive actions do not only keep experts from leaving their institutions in favor of another relatively better locally based institutions (or get involved in other resource generating activities while still maintaining their primary employment), it can also help contain the regional and international migration. This particular section is to reflect on the “dislocation” of expertise at home front and the “silent brain drain” that is taking place, i.e. the mismatch between job and expertise that takes place as a direct challenge to tapping existing resources and capacity building at the home front.

Universities and other academic and research institutions should and can make a concerted effort to tap the expertise of those who left and are leaving the institutions for better pay and working conditions. For instance, several international and regional organizations and NGO employ highly qualified individuals – in many cases these have had high positions in major national universities and research institutions. Universities can employ them on part-time basis, recruit them as consultants, engage them in conferences and meetings, solicit their expertise in formulating and reviewing research projects, advise graduate students, and serve as external examiners. While many countries complain about the impact of brain drain and its negative impact on national development, it is known that many failed in appropriately mobilizing and exploiting the expertise at their door step to national development.

Many countries in the South are not known for their action in building their alumni base. It is possible that organizing strong (civic) bodies are not taken lightly by numerous governments who often perceive such civic organizations as a potential threat to their legitimacy. While it may be politically sensitive to mobilize people as a group in some countries, universities may discreetly operate at individual and institutional basis. This notwithstanding, serious attempts have to be made to exploit and tap the potential of alumni inside and outside national borders and those who are “locally dislocated” and “locally mislocated”. Universities have to take a proactive role in this sphere.

One form of mobility that has taken some shapes and forms in the information age – and made possible by ICT – is what I would call “virtual brain drain”. Depending on the nature of the task, quite a variety of activities can now be accomplished without living ones domicile.

Experts actually do not have to leave their home countries to be brain-drained. Physical mobility does not have to take place for the expert to be “out of action”. “Soft” and “limbless” brain drain can take place given the technology.

Experts that are based at home can engage in a variety of initiatives outside their institutions – not just moonlighting inside their countries, but also moonlighting virtually beyond their borders. Remote consultation can be effectively mounted; experts can do consultancy work with or without any institutional affiliation at their home country. For instance, numerous North American companies enter into contract with companies that are based thousands of miles away in the developing world. Many American companies are known to actively employ the expertise of Asians that are based at home particularly in data entering, programming and other IT related activities. Reports indicate that data entered in Indian companies show up for business next day in the United States. Even recent reports confirm high-tech centers in Ghana inputting data for US-based firms.

For sure such interactions create job opportunities and generate much needed resources for those at the receiving end. It also has a strong economic, social and academic potency and immensely contributes to national development, particularly if this is augmented by healthy and appropriate policies. The point however here is, virtual moonlighting, should be given more emphasis for further investigation as a growing and possible aspect of “soft” brain drain. As a matter of fact, the situation and the possibility varies by countries but particularly in favor of those countries with advanced and reliable network and IT access. It appears, at the moment that this is a just a trickle, but for sure destined to grow significantly as technology expands.

Institutions are often used by individuals as a launching pad and as a base for interaction, consultancy, and other cooperative and joint initiatives. This is due largely that institutions have the requisite infrastructure as well as the credibility and reputation to make such initiatives possible. With increasing possibility of enabling environment, this might as well shift enabling home-based experts (without a particular institutional affiliation) to do it on their own.

Research indicates that ICT and virtual technology have enabled and fostered cooperation and collaboration among researchers and institutions that are located in different parts of the world. As much as ICT facilitates interaction for this particular purpose, that very possibility also enables institution-unsanctioned engagements which may divert attention and resources from institutions. It should be however recognized that the boundaries between institutional and non-institutional duties are vague and have posed a challenge to institutional leadership in many countries.

The very breakthroughs that made possible the tapping of Diaspora, can possibly work in a weak but opposite direction too. As much as cooperation and collaboration among the Diaspora and the home front are boosted and facilitated due largely to ICT, a good potential exists, though may be a slight one, for the possibility of brain drain to take place locally due to the interaction possibilities stated above. This is not to raise a premature or, some might even consider it as false, alarm – that ICT contributes in fostering brain drain, but to state the impending – and even currently materializing – possibilities. There is no insinuation that ICT directly causes “hard” brain drain – at least not yet. But there are now some signs towards that. According to Mark Davies, the founder of Ghana’s largest Internet café, BusyInternet, “Four out of five [of his online customers] are trying to find ways to get out of Ghana” (Zachary, 2002, p. 72).

Even though, not known by similar nomenclature, companies in the North are striking back at employees that misuse, abuse, and engage in private activities during their work hours using the Internet, instant messaging, and email. The point here is the idea of brain drain and the way we conceptualized it have significantly shifted and evolved and we should be able to keep track of its development. We have to put to test our assumptions and presumptions and scrutinize views that are firmly held.

Mobility in the subregion

Migration of highly trained experts to regional and neighboring countries – regional migration – has also been blamed as a cause of serious shortages of high experts nationally. In Africa, many academic departments have lost their preeminent as well as budding professors to universities in regional countries. Southern African countries such as Lesotho, Swaziland, and Zambia complain about the migration of their graduates and faculty to South Africa and Zimbabwe. Many Nigerians, Kenyans, and Ethiopians also work in many higher institutions in South Africa and also Botswana.

While there have been numerous complaints about the migration of experts regionally, very little have been written on the impact of such regional migrations on social, political, economic, educational, and cultural interactions among regional countries in particular and continents as a whole. Research indicates that researchers and academicians feel that experts from their own regions understand better issues pertaining to research, teaching, and the like; can possibly launch issues of regional significance; look into major regional issues in a regional perspective – African prism, Asian prism, and Latin American prism. These presumed advantages should be taken into account with in the context of tapping regional migrant community.

Europe is one of the major destinations of Diaspora communities. As Europe becomes increasingly less tolerant toward immigration and increasing xenophobia toward foreigners, and US's growing tighter policy on immigrants, highly skilled experts may find the regional "market" alternatively attractive. While existing body of literature on migration focuses largely on Diaspora overseas (in the developed world), a lot more work remains to be done on Diaspora community that are based regionally. The Diaspora phenomenon in the region while it is not a recent one, the current mobility trend targeting regional countries deserves more understanding.

The tapping of the Diaspora community should take into account the location and nature of the individual members that make up the community. For instance, some countries have a disproportionate size of their nationals working in regional areas. The region around which this community is scattered may have a lot of infrastructural challenges. For instance, Diaspora community from Ethiopia, Kenya, or Zambia that work around the South African region may not be as affluent, communicative, visible, resource-rich, influential, or interactive as their compatriot communities in North America or Europe. While virtual communication can enable to circumvent some of the problems in mobilizing them(selves) (and interacting with others beyond their regions), many challenges may still pose resistance. This is an important area of study that need to be explored.

Mobility overseas

The flow of experts overseas has been the subject of many studies and reports that largely surrounds this sphere of mobility. Much of the discussion in this report encompasses this trend.

Tapping the Diaspora: Magnitude, Significance, and Avenues

This article is laden with the phrase tapping and maximizing the potential of the Diaspora. What is the potential that can be tapped by mobilizing the Diaspora? Literally, what is the Diaspora worth? The following subsections examine these.

Economic and financial capital

The magnitude of the economic and financial benefits from the Diaspora is massive. In recent years, remittances have contributed substantially to the dramatic rise in private capital flows – which were only US\$5.6 billion globally in 1970, nearly the same as official development assistance, but reached \$243.8 billion in 1996, when Overseas Development Agencies was \$40.8 billion (Nihal Kappagoda, 1998, in Samuel, 1998).

Remittance payments from the Cuban Diaspora are at least several times larger than church and other NGO humanitarian assistance combined. Such remittances increased from the order of US\$100 million per year in the early 1990s to an estimated US\$600-800 million per year in 1995-97. The estimated three million Ghanaian Diaspora – 300,000 of whom professionals – that reside outside the borders of the country send remittances that reach US\$300-400 million per year. This amount has become the third largest foreign exchange earner for the country exceeding receipts from the sale of timber and timber products¹.

An estimated 1.5 million Ethiopians reside outside their country and remit an estimated US\$400 million a year. In order to capitalize on this huge resource and oversee Diaspora issues, the government recently established an office called “Ethiopian Expatriates Affairs General Directorate” under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Foreign currency remittance from the Eritrean Diaspora accounts for the accumulation of up to 60% of the foreign currency deposits of the country (Dept of State web site, 1999).

The value of remittances from Somalis is estimated between US\$ 500 million annually – around four times the value of livestock exports (Ahmed, 2000), and \$700 m (<http://www.iiss.org/>). Barakat, the most prominent money transferring company to Somalia alone –, whose business activities were severely disrupted post-September 11, report moving about US\$140 million dollars around the world, but mostly to Somalia, every year².

The Bank of Thailand announced that over 190,000 Thais worked abroad in 1998 and they remitted 21.1 billion baht (1USD=42 baht), an increase of 4.6% on 1997. The Indonesia Manpower Minister announced that Indonesian overseas workers had remitted \$US4 billion to the country in the past five years. This included US\$1.146 billion in financial year 1998. Official reports in Sri Lanka indicated that remittance income rose to a record 60 billion rupees in 1998 (1USD=49 rupees), an increase of over 10 billion rupees since 1997 (Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, ISCA, 1999).

In the past three decades Yemeni expatriates have transferred US\$65 billion, half from Saudi Arabia alone. This is equivalent to 50 percent of the foreign currency required to finance the Yemen's imports. The number of Yemenis working overseas is estimated at two million. The wealth of expatriate Yemenis was estimated at US\$40 billion and the government is investigating ways of luring these savings back to Yemen to invest in important projects.

A report in April put the number of Bangladeshi overseas workers at 267,667 in 1998. In 1998 overseas Bangladeshis remitted US\$1.59 billion, a slight increase over the year before. There are an estimated four million Filipino workers overseas. The government openly states that the country will depend on their remittances for many years to come. Between 1990 and 1997 they remitted more than US\$24 billion. Official Japanese figures put the amount of legal remittances abroad at 338 billion yen in 1998, but police have found 176 billion yen in illegal transfers (1USD=124 yen). As much as six per cent of the Philippine economy may be attributed to remittance payments from its Diaspora (Weinberg, 2001).

Underestimation of remittance is a common occurrence. Lack of efficient and fast services, high service fees of legally established financial institutions, such as banks and *hawalas*, lack of bank accounts and postal address of recipients, and lack of identification cards drive the often unregulated and informal money transfer networks. A recent field study in 1998-99 in Somaliland that examined the role of remittances provided by its large Diaspora reported that estimating remittances in Somaliland is problematic. First, remittances take a variety of forms and channels. Secondly, there is no data available on the global numbers of migrants and refugees from the country. Third, money transfer companies who are responsible for a significant part of transfers, sometimes deliberately under-report the size of the flows for fear of government interference in the form of taxes or new regulations (Ahmed, 2000). Another survey by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications in Japan found that 70 percent of Thai and Filipino workers interviewed sent money home by illegal means.

The remittances as we see above are – in some countries than others – crucial to increase balance of payment for the nation, increase consumption capacity, and rather

¹ <http://www.ghanasteelfund.com>

² <http://www.dawn.com/2001/11/12/int13.htm>

contributing directly in economically sustaining family members and relatives. How can we take this massive remittance to the next level – as an economic and business investment booster – to harness national development and go beyond the narrow purpose it serves? How can the financial potential of the Diaspora be effectively tapped and exploited for much broader developmental and investment schemes? While this remains a challenge, there is a general consensus about the quality, potential, and magnitude of Diaspora resources in socio-economic state of home country. As Ghanaian president Kufour acknowledges, Ghanaian Diaspora is “the single most important development partner of the nation”. Echoing on similar lines his cabinet minister reiterates that there would be no need for the country to depend on international loans if Ghanaian Diaspora are effectively mobilized (Eyasu, April 25, 2002).

Scholastic capital

The potential of scholastic benefits from the Diaspora community can only be gauged by the staggering statistics on the size and quality of educated community members abroad many of whom pursue an academic and scholarly profession as university professors, researchers, engineers, medical doctors, and high-level technicians. For instance, in the US alone, one in two African Diaspora has a university degree. The need to mobilizing this potentially powerful force goes beyond the economic benefits discussed earlier; it is important in stimulating and catalyzing home-based academic and scholarly institutions.

There are numerous ways in which this potential can and is being explored. These include joint research initiatives, exchange programs, sabbatical stays, sponsorship and mentoring of select departments, events, and students, establishing endowment, and sending to institutions published resources such as highly required journals and books.

The intellectual Diaspora can serve as a powerful force in the integration of the home country institutions to the center of the knowledge capital at host country. Joint research initiatives and joint publication opportunities stimulate and inspire the academic and research community at home to undertake research and publish their work. The joint publication opportunity presents researchers at home to be more exposed to international community of researchers in the field. And ICT has made this interaction ever more a reality. As one African scientist put it.

Internet and email play a very important role. It is very important for collaborative purposes. For example we are concurrently undertaking a research project from three locations in Africa and Europe. With projects that are launched from different countries, it is now possible to complete a three-month job in one week. Communication has been very smooth and fast.

The Diaspora community can be tapped to provide important guidance and advice to home institutions. It can serve in reviewing projects and providing a professional advice. Another African scientist captures this action well.

We recently approached our former colleague – who currently works for a major pharmaceutical company in the USA – to give us advice to purchase expensive equipment for our department. He gave us an important professional advice us which took into account financial, technical, and infrastructural factors. We are really grateful for that invaluable assistance (*ibid*).

Diaspora can serve as important information hub in locating, collecting, and sending information to fellow scientists at home. One of the serious challenges facing many home country institutions of the Diaspora is dearth of current and relevant published resources. In many African institutions, funds for subscribing journals have dried up many years ago; and only a handful of them are maintained through external support. Many researchers and scholars in the developing world recognize the support of the Diaspora communities in addressing this short fall by sending them published articles and other resources electronically and in print. For instance, at the end of every semester US students bring back their used books for resale. When the books are deemed to be no good for resale, most of the students dump them in large trash bins that go straight for disposal – possibly to recycling plants. These books and other educational materials can be effectively collected, packed, and sent to needy institutions abroad.

Diaspora can also help boost the state of scholarly journals by contributing research articles, reviews, and opinions to local journals and periodicals. This plays an important role in building the reputation of local and also regional journals that often suffer from a variety of problems, including shortage of publishable materials.

The richness and credibility of local and regional journals can be enhanced by actively involving the intellectual Diaspora as editorial and advisory board members for local and regional scholarly journals. Being able to draw from the expertise of the big intellectual community will help the life of the many local and regional journals that are struggling for their survival.

The Diaspora community can also be called upon to participate in major local and regional scholarly events such as organization of conferences, fundraising and networking. They have a great potential to unleash their expertise, contacts, and resources which also gives them an opportunity to interact with fellow scholars from home institutions.

Academic institutions in the United States are known to have numerous endowed programs and endowed chairs from which the community of the institutions draw benefits in their academic and intellectual quest. Such initiatives are uncommon in the developing world; in particular, only a handful of them exist in African institutions. The Diaspora can be mobilized in such schemes rather effectively in sponsoring endowed chairs, endowed programs, or even outstanding students. Such initiatives not only stimulate and inspire colleagues in bestowing upon them recognition. But such support to needy and deprived students make a difference in the decision of staying school and excelling in class.

Exchange programs among universities are a common phenomenon. These activities often take place regularly among academics, scholars, and students in the developed world. Exchange programs between American and European institutions are stronger; such programs are limited between the developing and developed world. The Diaspora can play an important role here.

Critical mass and invisible colleges flourish from these activities. Academic exchange and joint research initiatives are important aspects of the scholarly culture. Quite a large number of universities in the developed world consciously encourage and facilitate their professors and students to engage in such activities. Despite difficulties, universities in the developing countries and NGOs also attempt to do that.

UNESCO has been working on tapping the Diaspora by implementing a number of projects. The most prominent one is the TOKTEN project where select Diaspora return for short period of time to teach, research and share their experience with the community in their home country.

An organized and effective Diaspora community can effectively undertake the donation of books, journals, and other published materials to resource stricken institutions at home on a regular basis.

Diaspora has a great potential to serve as important information hub and vital contact points in locating, collecting, and sending information to fellow scientists at home. Colleagues that are now based in the developed world actively interact with colleagues at home in sending resources that are either unavailable or difficult to access. With unprecedented developments in ICT, this has become a routine activity. Colleagues send reference sources, abstracts, full articles to colleagues at home through electronic means contributing to their colleagues professional development.

In summary, Diaspora can effectively promote the state of scholarly environment in home country. Diaspora help contribute articles, opinions, and views to local journals and periodicals individually that can have an important ramifications on the scholarly market place. They can serve as editorial and advisory board members for local (and/or regional) scientific journals; help solve technical and professional problems, and develop joint initiatives. On the other hand, they can also co-publish with those experts at home on international journals that would give prominence not just for the individuals involved but also the institution as well. ICT have created a whole lot of dimension to these possibilities.

Visibility capital

For its size, the intellectual Diaspora community commands considerable visibility and presence than its compatriots at home. Scientific and technological discoveries and innovations that were made at home, can be effectively popularized and draw visibility if a Diaspora community can be brought aboard. The Diaspora communities have proven to be not just an effective conduit for the transfer of knowledge and information. They are also instrumental in popularizing their institutions in the world academic, professional, and business markets. The increasing interest in IT and software development in India emanates largely from the impact and the visibility of the Indian Diaspora in Silicon Valley, in the United States.

What do such visibilities bring about to individual researchers in particular and their institutions as a whole? Such visibilities are known to bring about more resources in a form of exchange programs, joint research initiatives, using institutions resources for fees, soliciting and organizing conferences, advising and examining graduate students, to state just a few. The high visibility of profiled individuals contributes in marketing the alma mater of these individuals. The snow ball effect of such prominence cannot be overemphasized.

Universities and academic institutions can and should take an active role in mobilizing and tapping the intellectual power and financial muscle of their Diaspora community across the world. In fact universities should take a rather aggressive policy – in cooperation with their governments – to ensure that these untapped resources are utilized and actively exploited.

Diaspora communities quite frequently and routinely operate through electronic organization and electronic discussion groups. This mode of operation has diminished to a considerable extent the serious problem of physical isolation that chronically plagues small academic communities.

Some active Diaspora communities have been known to manage TV and radio broadcasts in the host country. Nowadays many in Diaspora develop and maintain web sites featuring all kinds of issues about their home countries. They have become an important source of knowledge for the Diaspora and also for those at home about the Diaspora. They have become an official and unofficial but important source of information for researchers around the world, tourists, expatriates and others. Quite a large number of web sites hosted by Diaspora communities or individuals commonly feature their universities, colleges, and research institutions or provide links to those institutions. This is particularly significant when the web presence or information resources on institutions and/or home countries are short. In the course of undertaking a massive continental project, the author appreciated these opportunities – in understanding the general state of an institution, examining the areas of research and collaboration, and accessing contact address of researchers at home institutions – from web sites hosted by Diaspora community.

Political capital

An organized Diaspora community, particularly when this is augmented by big numbers and large resources, commands formidable political capital in a host country. The role of Jews, Armenians, and Cuban-Americans and to a growing extent Spanish Americans in the political landscape of the United States is a good testimony.

Politicians and law makers cater to such groups and enter into political courtship. In some cases such groups play a powerful role in the “making of a king” through their sheer number and also financial muscle. A mutual relationship is often forged where the interest of both parties is served. As often the case, the politicians get into tacit and explicit understanding with the constituencies in exchange for their votes that comes with a price tag.

The Diaspora – in their highest and effective form – have maneuvered in extending their clout and voice in urging, encouraging, and coercing their host country toward a home country. They have effectively help shaped favorable policies (of host countries) toward social, political, and economic spheres of home countries. Properly and effectively managed, Diaspora communities have effectively mobilized to help boost the channeling of the resources of the host country to home country by way of aid and relief, investment, and debt cancellation, among others.

On the other hand the Diaspora community have pursued unfavorable and restrictive policies toward home country. It is a common occurrence that many vocal Diaspora groups engage in lobbying their host countries to curtail political and economic support to their home countries. They often challenge loans, investments, and aid to home country when they fall out or disagree with governments in home country. Cuban-Americans are good examples here. They have played an important role in keeping alive the embargo on Cuba for about four decades. Dissident groups of the Diaspora communities lobby not only host governments but also their communities to refrain from any constructive activities and engagements that they may feel benefit the home government.

Tapping the Diaspora: A Compendium of Conjectures and Assertions

1) The extent of the Diaspora community contribution depends on the interest and the commitment of the individual to give back to home country.

Anecdote: Some of us are more interested and committed to help our former institutions or generally our country whenever we can. Some of us are better placed than others to do that. We must also recognize that those high-powered individuals make a lot of difference than some of us.

2) The contribution of the Diaspora as individual depends on the socio-economic status of the individual in the host country.

Anecdote: I would have liked to do more for my former institution, but my current research work in my current position and institution does not allow me to do as much as I wish. There are very few graduate students at the University where I am currently based; and the focus of my work currently has very little room for cooperation and collaboration with home institutions.

3) Tapping the resources of the host institution/country for the betterment of home country institutions depends on the infrastructure and preparedness of the home country institutions.

Anecdote: I am flying to my former institution to serve as an external examiner of Ph D candidates. I am joining one other colleague who will be meeting me from Sweden for the same task. We have 2 doctoral students who are having their theses defended. I am staying for 5 days in the country. Communication with the institution has been rather poor and frustrating. I did not even know if I was flying today, as I only received the air ticket yesterday. I could not prepare the materials/instruments I was planning to donate to the institution. I have a personal overhead projector and some books, but had no time to pack them to carry with me.

4) Communication plays a crucial role in the contribution of Diaspora communities to their institutions at home.

Anecdote: Not so long ago, a query was made on an electronic discussion forum on a particular honey producing insect considered to have numerous traditional medicinal values. A serious and engaging scholarly discussion ensued that brought about a lot of issues far and beyond the initial discussion point. There were reflections from the medicinal, economic, social, cultural, and global perspective. The Forum which is established by Diaspora now regularly features such issues. As a matter of fact, it has now started publishing a electronic bulletin on its web site.

5) Political factors play a crucial role in tapping the Diaspora.

In the absence of supportive and conducive governmental policies, the effort of Diaspora community and individuals can be disrupted and thwarted or even prevented. As we know, political persecution, fear of expressing ones opinion, suppression of human rights are some of the reasons of Diaspora migration. Governments and those persecuted are therefore often staunch enemies who would not even talk to each other let alone work together.

Anecdote: She now holds the highest office in the institution that makes major global decisions on her area of expertise. She now travels everywhere and do work closely with many experts all over the world – except her own. Her colleagues – with the tacit support of some in the government – ganged up to remove her from her position. She eventually left the country and landed this executive and high profile position. Or else she would have been thrown to jail for her affiliation with a former government.

6) In the presence of strong national interest toward ones home country, those who do not even talk to government work through third parties.

Anecdote: She would not cooperate with those individuals whom she seriously disagreed with while at home. But she provides guidance and directions and indirect support to her former institution in particular and the country as a whole. Recently she contributed significantly in the organization of a major international conference in her home country through a colleague in Diaspora who has been instrumental in the organization of the conference.

7) A disconnect between home institution needs and the Diaspora initiatives is common.

It is ironic that both underestimation and overestimation of existing resources and infrastructure of home country institutions are widespread.

Anecdote: An individual who is based in the West took a lot of pain to send us a big UNIX machine that came out of commission from his institution. He finally sent the machine. It took a lot of time and money to clear the machine from customs. When the machine finally made it to the addressed institution, it was discovered that it was too old and out of date that the personal computers of the institution were much better. The machine had to be discarded.

8) Existing infrastructure is instrumental in the interaction and collaboration of Diaspora with those at home institutions.

Anecdote: The Internet has optimized communication which makes collaboration with other institutions abroad more viable. Certain analysis are done abroad and this is communicated fast thanks to the Internet. This communication leap has also increased the scientific credibility of African scientists.

9) The Diaspora can increase its influence by closely working with experts based at home countries.

The impact of the Diaspora can be enhanced by working closely with grassroots at home.

Anecdote: I work closely with colleagues at home. I follow up issues at home closely and seriously. I participate in debates and discussions surrounding the social, political, and economic situation of my home country. I make sure that I travel to Africa as frequently as I can, not to loose sight of the reality, my advantage and edge in research and publication surrounding my country.

10) The cooperation and collaboration of Diaspora with home country colleagues and institutions has a tendency to run in to trouble by plethora of factors.

The engagement of the two bodies function from a different political, economic, academic, and cultural platforms.

Anecdote: A major scientific society which had been active for several years fell out with its local chapter not so long ago ceasing all its communication and interaction. The Society is based in the US and composed of prominent and successful Diaspora of that country. The Society has made significant and highly visible contributions and activities in promoting science and technology in the country. It had launched joint activities with home institution and also honored several professors at home institutions. The Society's activity with the local chapter came to an end over serious disagreement in honoring, what it considers, non-deserving individuals at home as awardees of the Society. The local chapter went ahead with honoring the controversial individuals which led to the severing of the relationship.

11) Engagement between the Diaspora community and home experts takes place among dissimilar – if not always unequal – academic and scholarly leagues.

The level and extent as well as viability of this interaction are contingent upon the compatibility of the communication variables between the two entities. We know that one of the prime causes of migration for many scholars is lack of academic freedom and persecution owing to government intolerance. How well does it go with these regimes to have a frequent and unregulated communication between the “dissident” Diaspora – who acquired the freedom to express themselves freely – and those at home who cannot?

Anecdote: We urged my colleague who is based in Africa to say more on the expulsion of university professors on his article that chronicles the state of higher education in his country. While he recognizes the unfairness of the situation he declined to comment on the matter leaving a hole in the discussion. He would later privately reminded me that we live in a different academic world shaped and determined by political forces.

Anecdote: My former student who is now a professor at a university in the Middle East wrote to me at length about academic and social hurdles in the country. I proposed to him to write an article on the matter for an academic journal. While he would seriously consider to do that, that he said has to however wait until he finishes his contract and get back home.

12) Envy, jealousy, rivalry, animosity, and competition pits the contribution of the Diaspora community.

We know that, many individuals have made it big outside their home countries. They have, with other colleagues in the Diaspora, established major and respectable regional and national forums that are often envied by those at home – who claim that those should have been owned and run by them. Furthermore, those who left their country are not always seen in a positive light by their countrymen, and that stigma and attitude hangs over them.

Anecdote: They deserted us living behind their institution that invested on them; and now they are gesturing the possibility of working together. What they really want is not really a genuine relationship and cooperation; just to aggrandize their academic stature in their host institutions.

13) The manner in which Diaspora community can be organized has diversified and evolved which makes tapping them both cumbersome and effortless at the same time.

Anecdote: We would like to address a far broader social and economic issues in this forum. As it happens, even though we do not have the opinion of the members of the forum, the moderator of the forum has suppressed our views. As a consequence we are establishing another forum where we can discuss far reaching issues.

Anecdote: It appears that we have a lot of issues under discussion in this forum. The amount of messages that are posted on the forum have become an issue of concern. In order to address this problem two solutions have been recommended.

14) Snowball effect is a common feature of the Diaspora.

Families and relatives of the Diaspora community based at home, have a high tendency of migration. Often, the Diaspora community plays a prominent role in offering guidance, facilitating the exiting process, and relocating the potential migrants. For instance, some Diaspora communities are known to pay fees on behalf of home students to take international tests (that enable them get access to foreign institutions).

Anecdote: I am currently vigorously working to bring my relative to a university as a postgraduate student. I have facilitated much of the requirements and circumvented some of the admission bottlenecks that enabled him to be accepted to the university rather promptly. This could have never been possible, had it not been for my association with the university. My presence here also owes a lot to my niece, who herself came married to a Diaspora husband (who is now a professor in a US university), who came as a graduate student through a full support and guidance of his brother, who is a professor in a US university.

Tapping the Diaspora: The Major Questions

“How can the Diaspora community be tapped to the fullest of their potential in nation building of their home countries?” remains a vital issue of discussion and debate of experts on migration. A number of initiatives have been launched and implemented guided by a variety of policies and guidelines; much of these however have had limited success. Before we take the liberty of deliberating on possible mechanisms of tapping and mobilizing the Diaspora, we need to examine first the implicit and tacit assumptions and presumptions that are embedded in this question and the major issues that are pertinent to it. The major assumptions interwoven in this inquisition can be reflected as follows:

Are governments genuinely interested in engaging and tapping their – often highly critical – Diaspora community in national development actions and debates?

Are there appropriate, tangible, and practical policies, infrastructure, and accompanying resources in place to invite the Diaspora community in national development? Are old and less-effective policies and their executive bodies be transformed to champion and espouse new policies? How should new policies work in conjunction with the old ones giving them more room and thrust? Or how new structures and thinking pervade the scenario?

How much do communities in home countries interested and prepared to engage with the Diaspora community? In what capacity and to what extent?

Would the Diaspora community – many who fled their countries for political persecution and lack of academic freedom – cooperate with the very government that after all allegedly forced them to exile?

How compatible is the social, cultural, academic, and economic infrastructure of the Diaspora community with the home country for an effective engagement in cooperative and collaborative initiatives?

How can Diaspora communities circumvent the possible challenges that may face them in contributing to institution building and national development, under the watchful eye of home governments?

What are the logistical and technical challenges that may be encountered in mobilizing and tapping the Diaspora community which is often unorganized, unregimented, and less known?

How can communities in the Diaspora – in their amorphous and unorganized form – be mobilized?

What is the psychological, intellectual and emotional attitudes of the potential collaborators at home institutions?

What kind of potential – financial and economic capital, political capital, visibility capital – does a particular Diaspora community command and can contribute?

What are the negative forces in the Diaspora community that constrain or even prevent the resourceful potential of their particular community?

Are the dynamics of cooperation between the Diaspora community and those at home recognized and established?

What are existing and potential avenues of effective collaboration and cooperation between the Diaspora community and the host countries?

What success and failure stories/experience exist in tapping the Diaspora community in the national context?

A conscious effort and discussion have taken place to delimit the boundaries of a Diaspora for current deliberation. For this exercise, we took a working definition of Diaspora as a self-organized collective body made of highly skilled expatriates who – in conjunction with other individuals at home – develop activities to contribute to the scientific and technical development of their home country. This article however has taken a much broader perspective taking this definition as a guideline. Many Diaspora communities however are not organized in the manner in which we decipher association. Diaspora is not a monolithic entity and subscribing policies to effectively tap it requires understanding its boundless forms and shapes. Diaspora is a community as complex as varied and divided by educational status, economic capacity, ethnic background, age, political, religious, and ethnic predilections, area of specialization, interest, concern, commitment, and capacity to contribute to national development.

We recognize that a variety of Diasporic forms exist – outcome of the variations that make up the group identity. Recognizing Diaspora as a diverse group helps in drawing up a variety of policies and approaches to tapping them. Mining the Diaspora is a tasking endeavor given their form of organization and absence thereof.

Conclusion

The literature on Diaspora has been dominated by perceived and purported negative impact of brain drain without viable approaches to address it. That a Diaspora community is an indispensable asset is a foregone conclusion. There is now a widespread consensus that a Diaspora community command an enormous, untapped, potential which can serve as vital resource in social, economic, political, cultural, academic, and scholarly life of home countries.

Diaspora has to be recognized by home countries as invested capital whose dividends should be reaped. Reaping these benefits entails putting forward healthy policies and incentives proactively. Literally, it is up to the home governments – that are known to complain on migration of their experts – to maneuver in the utilization of their untapped capital. The effort should be considered as a recovery mission of its diverted capital.

The challenge however remains how to boost and integrate the existing channels, resources and initiatives to bring about meaningful changes to home countries. Effective mobilization of the Diaspora requires effective utilization of the various avenues – both conventional and current. Governments, international organizations, NGO, and the Diaspora

should track and follow the paths and avenues upon which this can be maximized. The close working relationship between these groups cannot be overemphasized.

Recommendations

The forces that trigger the movement of human capital are numerous, diverse, complex, and dynamic. The avenues to tap this movement should also be as multifaceted as multidimensional; and this initiative is one major step forward toward this predilection. Of particular interest is, recognizing the status quo with regard to movement of experts and design appropriate policies to benefit both parties – the sending and the host countries.

Governments should take a proactive role in attracting and tapping the Diaspora by promulgating conducive policies and actions. Great opportunities will be missed in the absence of governmental commitment and recognition of the Diaspora community as a developmental partner.

Governments should be encouraged to develop a database of expertise on their highly trained Diaspora. Universities would probably be a good cite to execute the task. The database has to serve as a clearinghouse of high level expertise residing outside their country. This database should not only provide a list of the Diaspora community, their whereabouts and their expertise, it should also collect highly sought expertise in the country and prospect how they can get involved with the Diaspora community. It is worth tapping on already existing databases developed by various bodies.

Conferences and meetings should be organized for those leaders that can play a role in mobilizing and organizing Diaspora community. This will create a good opportunity for exchanging ideas and experience among the Diaspora leadership as well as think tanks to formulate appropriate policies to maximize the tapping process and integrating the resources of the Diaspora into important national development areas.

Embassies and foreign offices can and should actively involve in mobilizing the Diaspora community. They should provide current and reliable information and advice on areas of support, investment, and trade. While it is encouraging that many embassies now provide such information on their web sites, a lot of work remains in mobilizing the Diaspora community as a strong force of national development. The embassies should proactively act as a strong force of cooperation and collaboration.

While the Diaspora community possesses enormous resources, it is advisable that access to resources of NGO and International organizations be provided at least at the initial stages of its formation and organization. Efforts should be made in resuscitating fledgling Diaspora organizations, creating new ones, and also help them work together.

Governments, international and donor organizations, and NGO should encourage joint and collaborative research and development initiatives between colleagues at home and the Diaspora. For instance, we know that the majority of research grants and funds in universities and research institutions in the developing countries originate from external resources. These external agencies are known to wield considerable power in implementing policies to their liking and this force enables them to encourage and promote close working relationship among the two communities. NGO can also help governments to effectively utilize the Diaspora community.

Mobilizing the Diaspora community should actively take advantage of the opportunities created by virtual communication. Virtual networks – what I call celestial networks – have flourished as vital and basic avenues of communication by the Diaspora community. For instance, some governments have used the Internet to generate funds and mobilize their political supporters in the Diaspora. Some initiatives by the Diaspora community using the Internet and virtual communication to generate investment funds for their home countries illustrates an important picture. Ethiopia's Investment Fund and Ghana's Steel Funds are a few of the initiatives that attempt to bring the resources of the Diaspora into an investment opportunity to home country using the Internet as a major avenue of communication. Encouraging Diaspora

community to utilize the Internet as a major avenue of communication entails providing technical and financial support to ensure their virtual presence.

Country-based studies should be encouraged and initiated. These should specifically target, not just to chronicle existing scenario (and problems), but to come up with pragmatic solutions in enhancing and fostering the capacity of the Diaspora and integrating it to national development agenda. Such studies would presumably bring to light the idiosyncrasies of the Diaspora community of that particular country. The Diaspora communities are the outcome of a variety of factors: economic, political, academic, personal, and the like. Determining a major factor in the cause of the emigration – and capitalizing on the major factor that unites them currently – enables in proposing an appropriate policies and guidelines to tapping that community.

Governments should be urged to capitalize on new technology in tapping their Diaspora community. Government establishments are often slow in technology awareness and adoption. Government offices should be advised and technically supported in utilizing the current technological developments that simplified and boosted the possibility of tapping the Diaspora community.

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