



# What is Role of the African Diaspora in Ensuring the Renaissance of the Continent?

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## **Objectives**

This paper aims to highlight the role that members of the African diaspora can play in ensuring the renaissance of the African continent. Specific emphasis is placed on members of the diaspora who migrated to the United States from the seventies to today and their role in fostering economic development in Africa. The paper addresses the following question: what are the means to harness the intellectual capacity of members of the African diaspora in order to promote economic development?

The underlying assumptions in this question, which will be further examined in this paper, is that Africa is an emerging economy and the diaspora can play an important role in its emergence. Through participation in the continent's economic development, the African diaspora can become an influential force both in growing regional economies and in supporting positive social change throughout the continent.

This paper will highlight potential answers to the question including discussing the roles and responsibilities of African governments and political leaders to create an environment that encourages the contributions of members of the African diaspora in ways specific to the circumstances in their home countries. There is no denying the potential for Africans in the diaspora to advance development in the continent, but the question of how welcome they are in their home country can impede their influence. Other potential means to harness the intellectual capacity of members of the African diaspora will be further discussed including utilizing an online platform to create strategic partnerships and encouraging entrepreneurial opportunities for members of the African diaspora.

## **Challenges**

With almost one billion people and vast natural resources, Africa has tremendous opportunity to enhance its social, political, and economic development. Regrettably, these opportunities come with enormous challenges. Africa is the second largest continent and holds some of the world's most valuable resources, yet Africa is responsible for only 2 percent of global trade (Sako, 2006) and sub-Saharan Africa remains the most poverty

stricken developing region in the world; over half the population lives below the international poverty line of \$1.25 per day (IMF, 2011 Oct).

Recent events have not helped sub-Saharan Africa's development. The global recession resulted in a significant decrease in global trade and Africa's commodity exports have significantly shrunk. This has slowed down economic growth in the continent, reduced government and household incomes, increased unemployment, and decreased remittances ([http://www.undp.org/economic\\_crisis/africa.shtml](http://www.undp.org/economic_crisis/africa.shtml)). In 2009, South Africa went into recession after nearly twenty years of economic growth (IMF, 2010 Oct). Additionally, there are numerous ongoing conflicts in Africa including the East Africa food crisis, Nigeria oil crisis, Cote d'Ivoire civil war, and Ethiopia and Eritrea's ongoing border disputes.

Africa continues to face many other challenges. Much of the continent is in need of basic infrastructure, lacks government stability, and suffers from extreme poverty resulting in a lack of access to education, healthcare, and clean water among others. As a major source of many of the world's commodity exports, Africa lacks the technology, logistics, and expertise to get its products to international markets in the most productive and efficient manner possible. It also lacks policies that promote women's economic equality. According to the UNDP Human Development Report, women in Africa represent 52 percent of the total population, contribute approximately 75 percent of the agricultural work, and produce 60 to 80 percent of the food. Yet women earn only 10 percent of African incomes and own just one percent of the continent's assets (Negash, 2006 Dec). These numbers indicate that Africa's women are an enormous resource for achieving economic development yet still face tremendous barriers on the path to achieving gender equality.

Despite these challenges, the opportunities for a fruitful Africa are there. Progress requires targeted and strategic investment in human capital. These challenges, however, are about far more than providing funding. They cannot be met by any one government or entity, or even by dealing with one issue at a time. These issues are systemic and intertwined with societal, institutional, geographic, and global economic forces that require equally systemic responses. Utilizing the knowledge and resources of members of the African diaspora can be an important step in combating these challenges and advancing the opportunities.

## **Emerging Economy**

Despite the global recession, many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have been showing signs of economic progress and in the coming years are expected to grow at a rate faster than all other regions except developing Asia (IMF, 2011 Jan). According to an article on Africa by The World Economic Forum, “Africa is on the brink of a major transformation...and the outlook for the region remains bright at a time when the rest of the world is facing major political and economic challenges (WEF, 2012). Similarly, the IMF reported that “growth has remained strong in the region in recent years, and most low-income countries in Africa weathered the global economic slowdown well” (IMF, 2011 Oct).

Over the past decade, six of the world’s ten fastest growing countries have been in Africa (Table 1) and the IMF projects that the growth rate of sub-Sahara African economies will increase to nearly 6 percent in 2012 (Ibid.). In addition, Table 2 below shows impressive projections for Africa’s future growth potential over the next decade (MGI, 2010). According to the IMF, in 2010, GDP in sub-Saharan Africa is estimated to have increased by 4.7 percent, up from 1.7 percent in 2009 (IMF, 2010 Apr).

The statistics show that Africa is clearly an emerging economy, yet each of these articles discussing Africa’s potential has follow-up comments and warnings for the need for African economic and social policy reform. While such challenges require a massive amount of collective innovation from a variety governmental and business sectors, a sustainable solution requires active participation from the African diaspora in order to make progress toward cutting extreme poverty and encouraging business investment and economic growth.

## **Brain Drain**

Brain drain is a serious hindrance to capitalizing on Africa’s opportunities; overcoming this challenge requires the involvement of the African diaspora. Due to political, social, and economic challenges, many Africans in the seventies, eighties, and nineties left their home countries to begin a new life in the United States and other nations outside the continent. By 2009 there were nearly 1.5 million Africans living in the U.S. alone (McCabe, 2011). The contribution of African immigrants to the global economy varies by expertise and country of origin. In many industries there is a disproportionate amount of Africans practicing abroad and the resulting loss of their talent and expertise in the African continent is a major economic and social threat to Africa.

Healthcare is one such industry. The World Bank found that African countries have about 20 times fewer physicians and 10 times fewer nurses than developed countries (Liesel & Dussault, 2004 Sept). Part of this can

be attributed to the fact that many physicians from sub-Saharan Africa choose to practice abroad in places like the United States. The Human Resource for Health research found that the number of physicians from sub-Saharan Africa practicing in the United States represents more than 6% of the physicians practicing in sub-Saharan Africa (Hagiopan, Thompson, Fordyce, Johnson, Hart, 2004). Other telling statistics have found that there are more Ethiopian doctors practicing in the city of Chicago, Illinois than in Ethiopia (Madamombe, 2006 Oct) and of the 120 to 150 doctors Ghana trains each year, the country loses an equal number to migration (World Bank, 2011).

In addition to the healthcare industry, areas that have been adversely impacted Africa by brain drain include the technology, sciences, and higher education sectors. In professions in the medical, scientific research, and engineering fields, there are more professional groups represented outside of their home countries. In 2003, thirty percent of all highly educated Ghanaians and Sierra Leoneans lived abroad (Tettey, 2003). This loss of talent is a major economic and social threat to Africa. In fact, in recognition of this problem and in an effort to eradicate poverty, in 2000 African leaders established the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). NEPAD is now an integral part of the African Union and is commissioned to address poverty and underdevelopment throughout the continent. NEPAD aims to facilitate the region's socio-economic and political progress, with keen interest in finding ways to "reverse the brain drain." This recognition among African leaders underscores the magnitude of the problem and shows why addressing it is crucial to the continent's development.

Yet, Africans in the diaspora continue to be absent from the dialogue and action when it comes to the social entrepreneurship and social innovation phenomenon that is taking place in the United States and other parts of the world. As a result, in 2009, Social Edge/Skoll Foundation provided me an opportunity to publish an article entitled "Knowledge Transfer; For Greater Impact: The Case for Sub-Saharan Africa." The purpose of the article was to ignite dialogue on how to engage the African diaspora professionals to be a part of the long-term economic solution in Africa. For years, the focus of development in Africa has been on poverty reduction rather than on skilled labor creation and encouraging Africans to solve their own problems. Now we (Africans in the diaspora) have an opportunity to be a part of positive social and economic change in the continent by leveraging our knowledge and entrepreneurial skills.

### **Sub-Saharan Africans in the United States**

In the United States there is a significant amount of intelligent and skilled sub-Saharan Africans. In 2009, about 1.5 million African immigrants resided in the United States and there were 3.5 million self-identified members of the African diaspora. African immigrants made up 3.9 percent of all immigrants in 2009 (McCabe, 2011) [Table 3]. Interestingly, according to the U.S. Census, Africans have the highest educational attainment rates of any immigrant group in the United States and contribute to the economy at the highest level: “[African diasporans] are also more highly educated than any other native-born ethnic group, including white Americans. Some 48.9 percent of all African immigrants hold a college diploma. This is slightly less than the percentage of Asian immigrants to the U.S., nearly double the rate of native-born white Americans, and nearly four times the rate of native-born African Americans” (Ibid.)

Unfortunately for Africa this loss of highly skilled professionals has resulted in a severe brain drain. It has never been easy to calculate the value of the economic loss and/or human capital loss when Africans leave their home country. The World Bank estimates that Africans in the diaspora save about US\$53 billion per year and, in 2010, recorded remittances reached US\$40 billion (Ratha, Mohapatra, Ozden, Plaza, Shaw & Shimeles, 2011). This figure shows the magnitude by which Africans in the diaspora are participating in economic development of the continent. However, what is also evident is that government leaders in Africa have yet to create long-term, sustainable partnership programs with the diaspora. Although the ultimate extent of partnership may differ from country to country, there has yet to be an intentional partnership for the good of the continent with Africans living abroad—thus the continuing loss of knowledge and talent. This is why it is important to reach the African diaspora in the United States and to get them involved.

### **Utilizing the Diaspora – General**

“It has always been clear that the destiny of the continental African is intricately interwoven with the destiny of the diaspora African,” says Mr. Chike Nwoffiah, Founder of The Silicon Valley African Film Festival (Nwoffiah, 2012). In recent years this relationship has continued to be recognized. The African Union has been encouraging the diaspora to play a key role in the development of the continent. In 2007, the African Union partnered with the World Bank to launch the African Diaspora Program (ADP). The purpose of the ADP is to support the African Union in its diaspora global program and projects. The President of IFAD, Mr. Kanayo F. Nwanze, recently said that “Diaspora communities from developing nations save a total of \$400 billion every year. Many would like to support their home countries through investment. Money is not the problem. Good opportunities and clear mechanisms for making those investments are what is required” (UN, 2011 May).

The African diaspora has vested interest in leveraging their knowledge to support the continent. The dire poverty, unemployment, conflicts, and diseases that afflict millions of people in the continent affect diasporans as well. They are their brothers, sisters, neighbors, and friends. These problems, therefore, demand that governments engage the diaspora in strategic areas of economic development. Harnessing the African diaspora's collective knowledge is not an easy proposition. It is a challenge for both the governments and the individuals. It requires effort, creativity, transparency, and collective innovation from governments and individuals working together to develop long-term sustainable solutions.

In September 2000, the international community under the leadership of the United Nations agreed to adopt eight dire global challenges in order to create sustainable development in countries where people live on less than a dollar a day. The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015. These goals are unique in that they are backed by a consensus of governments throughout the world (Negash, 2009).

Unfortunately, the African diaspora has not yet caught up with MDG and/or determined what role to play in it. According to the recent UN and World Bank reports, sub-Saharan Africa has not shown progress in poverty reduction and the number of poor individuals has increased substantially. The healthcare system in most African countries still struggles to provide adequate treatment for those infected with HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other epidemics. Most important, the many episodes of civil unrest and border conflict, including the genocide in Darfur, hinder progress toward lowering child mortality rates and improving maternal health. These challenges present an opportunity for the African diaspora to play a key role in Africa.

### **Utilizing the African Diaspora - African Governments**

Governments in Africa ought to rethink how they want to harness the talents and resources of the diaspora. The new approach will require more than simply receiving remittances, rather, active efforts must be made to identify and facilitate the engagement of highly skilled Africans in the diaspora in national economic development projects. There are several African governments that have recognized the importance of engaging the diaspora. These countries are working through their embassies, the World Bank, and other means to find ways to collaborate. For example, in 2007, the Government of South Africa convened a dialogue in Paris with diaspora Africans from North America, and in 2008, the African Union hosted a high level summit in South Africa on how

to harness the knowledge and economic resource of the diaspora (AFTCD, 2007). This trend needs to continue; to do so, African governments need to create an infrastructure that is conducive to mobilizing and engaging the diaspora. These include supporting Millennium Development Goals and creating policies to incentivize entrepreneurial opportunities.

African governments should develop and enforce transparency. It is important that people understand the nature of the governing systems that have sustained the status quo and also the nature of the systems that will be required to sustain systemic change. Additionally, government's must modify policies and regulations that hinder investment. In March 2011, the African Development Bank and the World Bank released a document entitled "Leveraging Migration for Africa: Remittances, Skills, and Investments." One section addressed policies that African leaders should consider when engaging the diaspora (Ratha, et al., 2011). African governments could also improve their ability to utilize the diaspora by establishing a cabinet-level Office of Diaspora Affairs with regional offices around the world. It is evident that embassies and consulates do not meet the needs of the diaspora as they are primarily focused on engaging the host country. Therefore, governments should be more open to facilitating information exchange with the diaspora.

### **Utilizing the African Diaspora - Entrepreneurial Opportunities**

It is estimated that by 2040 Africa will have a larger workforce than China or India (SAF, 2011). This will require targeted new enterprise growth in areas that can enhance food supply, healthcare services, and educational solutions within local communities. This presents a wonderful opportunity for the diaspora to explore business development in the continent. To do so, African governments need to provide incentives. These can include tax incentives, improved contract laws, and improved access to capital for entrepreneurs.

The needs of locally owned African businesses are largely ignored when African governments create tax and investment incentives intended to grow the economy despite the fact that local entities stand to benefit the most from such incentives. African governments are too focused on the perceived benefits of non-African investors (e.g. US, Europe, Asia) when many African investor options exist on the continent from countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, Kenya, among many others. If leveraged correctly, these domestic African options can be a better investment option than non-African investments.



An important step that African governments could take to improve African diaspora involvement includes improving contract laws. Many members of the African diaspora who return to their home country with the intention to invest become frustrated with the inefficiencies. Contract law within African countries should be improved so that should written agreements be violated, there can be a quick and low-cost way to seek redress through the local court system. Such an action would help reduce the perceived risk of investing in African-based bonds, stock markets, companies, and local jurisdictions. In turn, this will help develop locally owned businesses, which results in increased local employment and an improved ability to compete with foreign firms.

African governments should also improve access to capital for entrepreneurs. Many from the diaspora have funds to conduct business in the short term, but in the longer term, they require access to funding in order to maintain and grow their businesses. Providing infrastructure, education, and financial and trade support enables individuals, local governments, and small businesses to grow in a more stable manner and do so with higher value-added components to their local enterprises. This could also require educating local banks about the diaspora and allowing international financial backing to encourage local financial institutions to provide reasonable financing to entrepreneurs. Given an equal opportunity to international entrepreneurs, local African entrepreneurs are capable of identifying the needs of their communities and creating a viable business that is invaluable to their communities.

### **Utilizing the African Diaspora – Online Collaboration Platform**

Initiatives such as mentoring, serving on boards, and creating an online and offline platform can help foster relationships between Africans and members of the African diaspora. Such a platform, which I call the African Diaspora Network (ADN), would allow indigenous Africans from around the world to benefit through collaboration with one another and other individuals and groups interested in Africa's future. By sharing knowledge and forming partnerships through a technological platform, governments can harness the intellectual, financial, philanthropic, and entrepreneurial capacity of Africans and friends of Africa for the greater good of the continent. The African diaspora constitutes a collective body of people dispersed in many parts of the world through which networks can be developed and individuals mobilized; all with a shared vision of creating economically and socially sustainable communities in Africa.

Sharing between members of the diaspora would require an active and intentional partnership where governments would allow the diaspora to serve as an important conduit in order to facilitate dialogue and action. Actions can

include human capital, knowledge sharing, financials, and other resources. By bringing together these dramatic new forms of public/private partnerships, this can provide a stronger support network for those in emerging regions.

The African Diaspora Network will be a combination of a social networking site, a database, an educational resource, and a discussion forum. It will be a platform for those interested in development in sub-Saharan Africa including the African diaspora and friends of Africa. Some of the tools ADN will offer include:

- A searchable repository of the African diaspora and friends of Africa that can be searchable by location, expertise, enterprise, or organization type.
- Members will have profiles in order to share information and connect with potential partners.
- Advice collected from experts on African economic and social development on topics including funding, successful projects in the past will be made available to members.
- Educational resources on Africa will be made available.
- A forum will allow a global dialogue on sub-Saharan African issues and will serve as the means to share experiences and advice.
- Grassroots organizations and local African entrepreneurs can seek support and advice from individuals and organizations outside of Africa.
- Volunteers can connect with potential organizations to work with social innovators and entrepreneurs can share their business plans, advice, and seek support.
- Potential lenders can access information about ongoing and potential development and investment projects across Africa.

### **Example – VillageReach**

The African diaspora has a collective knowledge that comprises many different areas of expertise. Individual members are able to start their own ventures, conduct high-level research from IBM to NASA, or teach in higher education. Many have come up with innovative ideas such as the international nonprofit VillageReach. However, as in any society, the level of education and source of income varies by individual, by country of origin, and at times by gender. The composition of entrepreneurs from lesser-developed countries is different from that of the indigenous population. The newcomers tend to differ in respect to the bundle of resources—human, financial, social, and cultural capital—at their disposal when compared to their indigenous counterparts (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001).

Africans are attached to their home country both emotionally and spiritually. The bond to their home continent transcends barriers such as political and social unrest. Africans will do anything they can, including borrowing money and using their life savings, to visit families at home and support their families however possible. One clear example of the connection between a member of the African diaspora and his home country is Blaise Judja-Sato's creation of VillageReach (<http://villagereach.org/>).

*Born in Cameroon, Blaise Judja-Sato was a successful U.S. businessman until a devastating flood in Mozambique prompted his return to Africa. While helping with relief efforts, he saw both the suffering of the rural poor and the frustration of nongovernmental organizations that could not get medicines across the "last mile" of remote country to those in need. Judja-Sato founded VillageReach (VR) because he recognized that the solution involved building a reliable "pipeline" infrastructure. He also realized that these last-mile barriers affected industries and others who might be willing to pay into a shared system that benefited everyone. As a result, he founded VillageReach. VillageReach increased immunization coverage rates for children under age 5 in northern Mozambique from 68% to over 95% with an innovative last-mile logistics system that costs the government less to operate than its previous system. The Mozambique Ministry of Health is now partnering with VR to implement the new system throughout the entire country.*

The Mozambique government saw a committed partner in Blaise and provided him the support he needed to create a social venture for the good of the community. Many more partnerships like VR are needed in order to harness and effectively utilize the knowledge, resources, and commitment of the African diaspora.

### **Example – Nigerians in the United States**

According to the American Community Survey, Nigerians represent the largest group of African immigrants in the U.S. In 2009 there were more than 216,000 Nigerians who emigrated to the U.S. This was almost 14 percent of the total African population that immigrated to the U.S. in that period (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Nigerians in the U.S. are well educated and speak English, which allows them to overcome the language barriers that many other immigrants face. The Nigerian contribution in the United States varies from entrepreneurship to science, technology, and entrepreneurship. Some notable names include: Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Prof. Chukwuma Soludo, Dr. Adeniji, Mr. Peter Obi, Prof. Emmanuel Aniebonam, and Prof. Bolaji Aluko. These are Nigerian thought leaders who are contributing to the economic and educational development in the United States. Nigerian

immigrants have some of the highest levels of education in the nation, surpassing whites and Asians (Casimir, 2008). There is a concerted effort by Nigerian Americans to find strategic ways to ‘transfer knowledge to their home country’ (Uwaje, 2012). The Nigerian Computer Society (NCS) in 2001 embarked on a major project of re-connecting with Nigerian knowledge resources abroad by mounting the first Nigerian Information Technology Summit at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., USA (Ibid.). This led to the establishment of the Nigerian Diaspora Commission by the Federal Government. Clearly there are many skilled members from other African nations in the United States, and they can follow the example of the Nigerian Diaspora Commission to develop useful relationships with the governments in their home nations.

Mr. Nwoffiah sums up the importance of the position that members of the African diaspora are in when he explains (Nwoffiah, 2012):

*“The diaspora African is for the most part a transnational with one foot planted in the old country and the other in the new country. The diaspora African has allegiance to both countries, but it is clear that the diaspora African is wired to always see home in the old country even though he/she may live in the new country for decades. This natural allegiance to the old country must be nurtured, cultivated and channeled in order to fuel the new African resurgence in the world.”*

## **Closing Remarks**

Africa has a bright future. The information and communications infrastructure, however slow, is providing people access to knowledge and resources they have never had. Greater numbers of women are participating and playing major roles in business, politics, and social movements than ever before. There is an increased awareness and demand for governments and businesses to be transparent and accountable to the people whom they represent. If this trajectory continues, there is nothing to stop Africa from becoming a peaceful, just, and prosperous continent.

Fully utilizing the members of the African diaspora is a complex challenge, but the importance of the entire African diaspora to the development of the Africa is undeniable. This paper discussed many ways in which to harness the intellectual capacity of members of the African diaspora in order to promote economic development. Hopefully in the years to come we will see many more examples like the African Diaspora Network, VillageReach, and the Nigerian Diaspora Commission.

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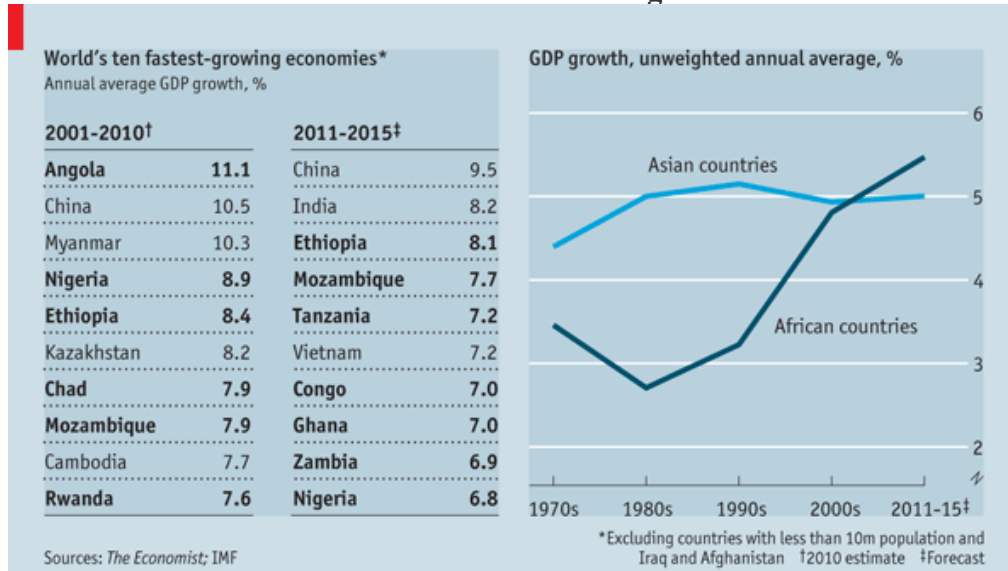
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## EXHIBITS

**Table 1**  
**World's Ten Fastest Growing Economies**



**Table 2**  
**Current and future growth potential for Africa (McKinsey&Co, 2011)**

Africa 2010	Africa 2020
\$1.6 Trillion Collective GDP	\$2.6 Trillion Collective GDP
\$860 Billion Combined Consumer Spending	\$1.4 Trillion Combined Consumer Spending
316 Million Mobile Phones signed up since 2000	1.1 Billion the number of Africans who are of working age.
60% Africa's share of World's total uncultivated Arable Land	128 Million the number of Africans with discretionary income.
52 African Cities with more than 1 million inhabitants.	50% of Africans will live in Cities.



**Table 3****Total and African Foreign-Born Populations, 1960 to 2009**

Year	Total foreign born	African born	
		Number	Share of total foreign born
1960	9,738,091	35,355	0.4%
1970	9,619,302	80,143	0.8%
1980	14,079,906	199,723	1.4%
1990	19,797,316	363,819	1.8%
2000	31,107,889	881,300	2.8%
2009	38,517,104	1,492,785	3.9%

*Source:* Data for 2000 from the 2000 census; 2009 data from the American Community Survey 2009. Data for earlier decades from Campbell Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 1990" (US Census Bureau Working Paper No. 29, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1999).

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*Chapter 27. Making a case for the utilisation of African diaspora in promoting economic development of the continent / Almaz Negash –*

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