



Diaspora Collaboration and Knowledge Production in Africa: Reflections on Caveats and Opportunities

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Abstract

Irrespective of its conceptualisation, diaspora contributes to the development of the homelands through diverse forms of collaboration. The increase in remittances and diaspora involvement in fostering democratic values are obvious examples. A new emphasis, however, is on developing the African academia through various forms of partnership and collaboration between diaspora-based and African-based academics. A number of initiatives, funding opportunities and research partnerships to this effect are emerging. Nevertheless, these partnerships are complex and do not always translate into win-win situations, especially for institutions and academics in the global South. In this article, I reflect on some personal experiences in research collaborations as part of the diaspora and as an African-based academic. In so doing, three possible caveats in maximising the gains of diaspora partnerships in knowledge production are highlighted. I argue that while opportunities for knowledge collaboration abound, ensuring a sustainable win-win relationship in diaspora partnerships demands careful introspection at every turn.

Keywords: diaspora, collaboration, knowledge production, partnerships, Africa

Résumé

Quelle que soit sa conceptualisation, la diaspora contribue au développement des pays d'origine par le biais de diverses formes de collaboration. L'augmentation du nombre d'envois de fonds et le rôle joué par la diaspora pour promouvoir les valeurs démocratiques en sont des exemples probants. Toutefois, un nouvel accent est mis sur le développement du monde académique africain par le biais de diverses formes de partenariat et de collaboration entre les universitaires de la diaspora et les universitaires basés en Afrique. Plusieurs initiatives, possibilités de financement et partenariats de recherche à cet effet émergent actuellement. Néanmoins, ces partenariats sont

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complexes et ne se traduisent pas toujours par des situations gagnant-gagnant dans les pays du Sud. Dans cet article, je réfléchis à certaines expériences personnelles dans les collaborations de recherche dans le cadre de la diaspora et en tant qu'universitaire basé en Afrique. Il convient toutefois, de souligner trois restrictions éventuelles à l'optimisation des avantages des partenariats avec la diaspora dans la production des connaissances. Je soutiens que si les possibilités de collaboration dans le partage des connaissances abondent, il faut constamment pratiquer une introspection méthodique, pour assurer une relation gagnant-gagnant durable dans les partenariats avec la diaspora.

Mots-clés : diaspora, collaboration, production des connaissances, partenariats, Afrique

Introduction

The contribution of the diaspora to developing economies and societies in conflict has been documented in the last decade or more by scholars and major development organisations such as the World Bank, the International Organisation for Migration and the African Union (AU), amongst others (see Vertovec 2005; Rustomjee, 2018). Diaspora contribution to development in sub-Saharan Africa has been largely in the form of remittances (AfDB/OECD/UNDP 2015; AU 2014), job creation through foreign direct investment (Plaza and Ratha 2011), poverty reduction (Newland 2004) and in mediating political unrest and conflicts (Nielsen and Riddle 2010). However, until recently, very little has been done on engaging with the diaspora in terms of developing the knowledge base in Africa from a knowledge economy perspective. Tejada and Bolay (2010) argue that, considering the demands of the knowledge economy, the movement of academic elites from the global South to the North can be seen as a threat, irrespective of the push factors responsible.

However, in addressing this threat, research partnerships and collaborations are being encouraged and supported as a growing trend in stemming brain drain while advocating for new approaches such as brain circulation (Jadotte 2012). With the need to strengthen research capacity in lagging regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, establishing research partnerships and networks with emigrants in more advanced economies and systems has significantly increased the knowledge-producing capacity of these regions. Boshoff (2010) shows that about 80 per cent of all research papers from Central Africa are produced in collaboration with a partner from outside the region, with close to half of this number published in collaboration with an academic in a European country. This signifies an increase in international collaboration and the potential of the diaspora.

Increasingly, most Western countries and organisations have emphasised the need to strengthen research collaboration through various funding and grant schemes. Some of the major research funding agencies, such as the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the British Council, the Department for International Development, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and South Africa's National Research Foundation, now include research collaborations between academics in the global North and the global South as a key prerequisite for successful funding proposals. There is evidence that some of these partnerships are with African academics based in the global North.

With increasing globalisation and common challenges facing humankind, collaboration and partnering in knowledge-producing efforts become vital for developing global solutions. From a diaspora perspective, Tejada and Bolay (2010) argue that the African diaspora has a significant role to play in supporting and promoting development through knowledge generation and application. They argue that:

Retrieving the value and resources of emigrated scientist and professionals, either through physical or virtual exchanges, along with the strengthening of a country's capacity and infrastructure to support and maintain its elites are comprehensive aspects of a brain-gain strategy for developing countries. (Tejada and Bolay 2010:xiii).

However, caution has been suggested in the process of such exchanges. While appreciating the exponential growth in collaboration and partnerships for research and knowledge production, one must recognise the fact that these partnerships are characterised by complex micro and macro political, social, cultural and contextual realities and challenges (e.g. De-Graft Aikins et al. 2012; Teferra 2009). Therefore, scholars have argued for the importance of adopting a reflexive approach to partnerships between academics in the diaspora and those in developed economies. De-Graft Aikins et al. (2012) call for academics to continuously reflect on and record the dynamics of partnerships and collaborations as both a learning process and an academic endeavour.

Especially for partnerships between African academics in the diaspora and those on the continent, this article presents personal reflections on research collaboration experiences both as an academic in the diaspora as well as one in the continent in partnership with those in the diaspora. The first part of the article provides a broad conceptualisation of the notion of diaspora, situating my understanding of diaspora. The next section presents contextual knowledge challenges facing higher education in sub-Saharan Africa. I argue that African diaspora could fill this knowledge-creation

gap through diverse forms of collaboration and partnership. Based on personal experiences in research collaboration teams as part of the diaspora and part of the African-based academe, the last section captures some of the challenges and opportunities in establishing research collaborations for sustainable knowledge production, identifying possible caveats in such partnerships. I conclude with a word of caution for both sides when designing and implementing such partnerships.

(Re)conceptualising the African Diaspora

Cohen (1997) traces the root of the term ‘diaspora’ to ancient Greek, formed as a composite word of two elements: *spiero* (to sow) and *dia* (over). However, the word has since gained a more negative connotation and been linked to oppression, forced displacement and an unending search for a place perceived as an authentic homeland. Diaspora as a concept has very often been linked to the traumatic experiences of the Jews (Cohen 1997) and, for Africans, the Atlantic slave trade era (Akyeampong 2000). Most discussions of diaspora, especially in Africa, lean on the works of scholars such as Safran (1991), Clifford (1994) and Cohen (1997).

Mohan and Zack-Williams (2002) have expanded the understanding of the African diaspora and its role in the development of the continent. Their conceptualisation builds on the work of Cohen (1997) and Safran (1991) to develop three understandings of diasporas. Firstly, they show from Cohen’s work that not all diasporas are involuntary, thus affecting the conceptualisation of the way diasporas can contribute towards different forms of development of their ‘homelands’. Therefore, it becomes important to include more voluntary and proactive movements of people and spatial connections. Secondly, Cohen argues that while Safran sees the diaspora as people who have been displaced from their homeland, to which they or their descendants should ultimately return, based on the Jewish experience, not all in the diaspora have that aspiration. The International Organisation for Migration’s 2012 migration policy echoes this conceptualisation, defining diaspora as ‘emigrants and their descendants, who live outside the country of their birth or ancestry, either on a temporary or permanent basis, yet still maintain affective and material ties to their countries of origin’ (Agunias and Newland 2012:15). The AU emphasises the development need of these ties in its development-focused definition of diaspora as ‘any person of African origin living outside Africa who wishes to contribute to the development of Africa’ (Plaza and Ratha 2011:3). Diaspora, according to Cohen, therefore ‘includes characteristics that see both the imagining of home and its physical well-being and rejuvenation as crucial to defining diaspora’ (in Mohan and

Zack-Williams 2002:216). In Anderson’s (1991) terms, unlike nation-states, diasporas are very much an ‘imagined community’. A third conceptualisation of diaspora according to Cohen is the need to think about the multiplicity of sites of exile or homeland and the connections between them. This approach questions the spatiality of diaspora and rather highlights the role of relationships and networks between individuals, starting from their initial point of departure and across previous places of residence and ‘home’.

Furthermore, based on this evolving and changing nature of diaspora identity relating to actual or imagined homeland, Vanore, Ragab and Siegel (2015) propose a typology for understanding diaspora. This typology characterises a number of positionalities and aspirations towards homeland development or change. The typology has been adapted in this article and informs some of the discussion and analysis of diaspora contribution to Africa’s knowledge development and research objectives.

Table 1: Two possible constructs of diaspora

	Traditional conceptualisation	Evolving or constructed conceptualisation
Emergence of diaspora	Natural results of forced or voluntary migration	Outcome of political transnational mobilisation
Membership	Those who share collective identity and connection to homeland	Those who mobilise to engage in homeland socioeconomic and political development processes
Source of identity	Fixed: ethnic, national or religious	Evolving; multilayered and dynamic; ethnic, national, religious, gender, social class, political affiliation
Institutions and values	Fixed, unified and homogeneous	Dynamic, contested and heterogeneous
Engagement in conflict and development	Either peace maker or peace wrecker; support development or part of the hegemonic	Various in dynamic roles for conflict and development

Source: Adapted from Vanore et al. (2015)

In this article, I lean on Cohen’s third notion to conceptualise diaspora dually. Firstly, I perceive the notion of African diaspora to relate to Africans living in parts of the world different from their country of birth or nationality (including the African continent). So, in a broad sense, I define diaspora to refer to a group of Africans (African academics in this case) with a shared sense

of identity and a connection to a real or imagined place or sense of origin and 'home' elsewhere (Chikezie 2011). This could be those living in other parts of the world or in other countries within the African continent. Thus, although being an African living on the African continent, I imagine my relationship to my country of birth as a diasporic relationship. Furthermore, my involvement in research projects with other academics from the global North also informs my experiences of research collaboration using a diasporic lens. Secondly, based on the time spent outside the continent during which I was privileged to be part of various research partnerships, I reflect on my research experience with colleagues in Africa to highlight some of the opportunities and challenges in enhancing diaspora partnerships in knowledge development in Africa. My double positionalities as both part of the diaspora and part of the African academe allow me to reflect from both sides of the spectrum.

Knowledge Production in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Collaborative Approach

As argued by Morgan (1997:493), 'Contemporary capitalism has reached the point where knowledge is the most strategic resource and learning the most important process.' Every successful region has positioned knowledge and learning at the centre of development planning and practice. Knowledge and academic and student collaborations and partnerships can be perceived in three broad ways: firstly, through delivering instructional material in the form of student exchange, visiting fellows, branch campuses and joint degree programmes; secondly, through cross-border research partnerships such as research projects, faculty development or accreditations; and thirdly, through harmonising curricula and operating regulations. In developing the 'Europe of Knowledge', the European Commission has called on higher education institutions to participate more actively in partnerships towards knowledge production and application (Maassen and Olsen 2007). While there are conscious efforts to enhance knowledge production through collaboration with diaspora within the sub-Saharan African region and from those outside the continent, a number of inherent challenges continue to affect the success of such collaborations. I present some of these challenges with particular reference to how they relate to one of the three forms of collaboration or partnership mentioned above.

African Union and New Partnership for Africa's Development In the mid-1990s, regional integration was emphasised by the president of Libya, Muammar Gaddafi. This call was heeded by other African presidents and led to the adoption of the AU charter via the Sirte Declaration. In 2001, the AU and the New Partnership for Africa's Development started, with the former

starting in Zambia. With an interest in higher education, the AU promoted the Plan of Action of the Second Decade of Education (2006–2016) and placed higher education as the highest priority, a shift from the focus on primary education which characterised the discourse of the previous decade. The AU has referred to the paramount role of education in promoting regional integration through inter-university cooperation and the need to mainstream education into its regional initiatives (AU 2011).

This need has been demonstrated in the revision of the Arusha Convention of 1981. The convention provided a framework for recognising studies and degrees across the continent with the view to promoting regional cooperation and the role of the diaspora through the academic mobility of students and scholars (UNESCO 1981). However, about three decades after the adoption of the convention, only twenty countries have become signatories and the expected milestones are far from being achieved. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation and the AU Commission revised the Arusha Convention in 2007 for better ratification and implementation. This necessitated creating new organisations, such as the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, to ensure the implementation of the convention. However, the absence of a functioning Credit Accumulation and Transfer System has limited the level of mobility between students, as well as the level of collaboration and partnerships between institutions.

In 2007, the AU released a draft policy, the Harmonisation of Higher Education Programmes in Africa, which aims at strengthening the capacity of higher education and improving the quality of education provision in Africa:

The African Union Strategy for Harmonisation of higher education...will facilitate the comparability of qualifications awarded across the continent and help drive quality assurance measures which will ultimately contribute to greater quality of education in Africa. Creating a mechanism for benchmarking and comparison of qualifications will allow for professional mobility for employment and further study, as well as expanded job markets. Developing widely accepted standards for quality will also facilitate creation of centres of excellence. Harmonisation will benefit Africa, since it will allow for greater intra-regional mobility, thereby fostering increased sharing of information, intellectual resources, and research, as well as a growing ability to rely on African expertise rather than skills from elsewhere in the world. It will increase access to reliable and transparent information, and promote greater networking between all stakeholders in higher education... On a broader level, it has the potential to create a common African higher education and research space, and achieve the AU's vision that African higher education institutions become a 'dynamic force in the international arena'. (AU 2007:3–4)

Explicitly, this process is aimed at ensuring qualification portability and mobility, regional development of higher education, and regional development to address what the World Bank (1999) refers to as 'information problems' in African higher education. While there is a policy structure for collaboration, there seems to be more of an ad hoc approach with more individual initiatives.

Association of African Universities

The Association of African Universities (AAU) was established in 1967 to facilitate cooperation between African-based academics and the international academic community. It is the apex organisation and forum for consultation, exchange of information and cooperation among institutions of higher learning in Africa. It represents the voice of higher education in Africa on regional and international bodies and supports networking between institutions of higher education in teaching, research, information exchange and dissemination. The AAU has been at the forefront of initiating and supporting the repositioning of higher education in Africa as an agent for national and regional development. Considering the numerous challenges facing African universities and their limited capacity to respond to these challenges, the European University Association and the AAU argue that:

one strategic way to address these challenges is through higher education partnerships. If...structured efficiently and sustainably, partnerships can generate research and teaching capacity, empowering universities as economic drivers and agents of knowledge transfer. Furthermore, university partnerships are a strategic means to contribute to the overall capacity development of African universities. (EUA 2010)

The need for more university partnerships between African universities at regional levels and also with European universities has not been fully recognised. This is in line with the AU's Plan of Action of the Second Decade of Education, which confirms the urgent need to revitalise African higher education institutions and promote regional cooperation. However, most members of the AU have remained passive in regards to this agenda. This demands a different approach to enhancing such collaborations. Akyeampong (2000:214) argues that 'Africa and the African diaspora stand fused in ways that have immense political, economic and social possibilities' not only for economic development and enhancing political stability, but also for knowledge-sharing and institutional revitalisation. In the southern African region, the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) Protocol on Education and Training has emerged as a framework to enhance such cooperation.

SADC Protocol on Education and Training

As mentioned, the importance and need for knowledge production has shifted to more regional blocs, as seen with the 'Europe of Knowledge'. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) are similar initiatives to enhance regional development through advancing knowledge, collaborations and competitiveness. Likewise, the signing of the SADC Protocol on Education and Training is an initiative to harness the knowledge role in an African bloc. The protocol provides the policy framework for regional cooperation and integration of the entire education sector. Concluded by SADC member states in 1997, it paves the way for educational institutions in southern Africa to cooperate with one another and to prioritise the admission of SADC students over students from non-SADC regions. This also applies to issues of fees and other aspects of academic engagement.

The establishment of the protocol was based on a number of key assumptions. Significant to this article is the realisation that knowledge and universities have become indispensable for national and regional development and that there is a need for improved and sustained cooperation and collaboration between member states. The Preamble to the protocol states that:

- No SADC member state can alone offer the full range of world-quality education and training;
- Programmes of human resource development should have a national and regional dimension; and
- Concerted efforts in education and training are needed to equip the region with the necessary competencies for the twenty-first century.

The protocol therefore encourages institutions in southern Africa to enhance regional collaboration at higher education institutions through:

- Reserving at least 5 per cent of admissions for students from SADC nations;
- Facilitating the mobility of their staff and students within the region for purposes of study, research, teaching and other pursuits relating to education and training;
- Treating SADC students as local students for purposes of fees and accommodation;
- Establishing institutional partnerships with other institutions of higher learning in SADC; and
- Encouraging the establishment of collaboration agreements between their components (SADC 1997).

The SADC leadership has gone further to establish key frameworks and committees to ensure the implementation of the protocol, including the Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation, the SADC Qualifications Framework and the Southern African Regional Universities Association. These bodies have been assigned different tasks, all aimed at achieving a regional higher education community in the southern African region.

CODESRIA's Diaspora Programme

Within the framing of knowledge production and collaboration within the SADC region as well as in other regions on the continent, CODESRIA has developed a number of initiatives to not only support knowledge production in Africa, but also to facilitate collaboration across African countries, which has hitherto been very limited compared to collaboration between African academics and Non-African colleagues (Kotecha, Wilson-Strydom & Fongwa 2012). Boschhoff (2010:500) shows that, of the research outputs produced in the region between 2005 and 2008, only 3 per cent were co-authored by researchers from two or more SADC countries, and just 5 per cent jointly authored by African academics. This is in contrast to 47 per cent of scientific papers co-authored with academics in the global North. With the objectives of promoting and facilitating knowledge production, strengthening institutions and encouraging collaboration between African academics in the continent and those beyond, CODESRIA is serving a significant knowledge production role as established in the SADC protocol. One of such programmes is the Diaspora Support programme.

With financial support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, CODESRIA has launched a new initiative aimed at strengthening partnerships and collaboration between African academics in the diaspora and those in African universities. While CODESRIA adopts a conceptualisation similar to Safran's (1991) understanding of diaspora as those who have moved from their homeland, Africa in this case, and are now in other parts of the globe, the actual implementation of the partnership has been extended to other Africans on the continent. The initiative, called African Diaspora Support to African Universities, aims, *inter alia*, to nurture a new generation of African scholars in a culture of excellence, and to revitalise higher education in Africa, especially the social sciences and humanities – a set of academic disciplines that has been less funded over the last decade as emphasis on STEM (science, technology,

engineering, mathematics)-related fields has increased. The programme also aims to strengthen collaborations between academics in the global North and those at African institutions, where most of those in the diaspora were based before migrating.

As many of these academics are willing to contribute to the development and knowledge-producing function of local universities, CODESRIA aims to provide the logistic support needed by these collaboration efforts, such as:

- Facilitating joint thesis supervision between local academics and those in the diaspora;
- Supporting the review and development of more relevant curricula in the social sciences and humanities fields;
- Facilitating the exchange of literature and new pedagogical processes and methods;
- Enabling diaspora academics to take up short-term teaching engagements at African universities; and
- Enabling academics in the diaspora to serve as external examiners for other university departments.

CODESRIA thus serves a leveraging role for enhancing collaboration and academic partnerships between African academics in the diaspora and those in Africa for teaching, research and knowledge-generating functions in African universities.

To conclude this section, a number of observations can be made. Firstly, the role and importance of knowledge and education in Africa's development has been recognised from a policy point of view. This has led to the development of various structures and bodies to enhance the development of knowledge partnerships and skills across the continent. However, other than CODESRIA, very little effort has been made to explicitly engage with the African diaspora.

Role of the African Diaspora in Knowledge Development: Perspectives from the Global North

In the face of forces of globalisation and the weakening of national boundaries, higher education systems must be able to respond to these challenges. As observed in the preceding section, a key aspect of this response has been the development of policies, agreements and academic protocols between multiple countries, aimed at breaking barriers and

challenges which once limited the ability of institutions to maximise their capacities in teaching, research and knowledge production. I argue that the African diaspora can be a possible player in enhancing knowledge production in Africa through effective and sustained ways of linking diaspora and research on the continent.

Recently, the European Commission (2015) acknowledged the role of the African diaspora in supporting the development of higher education on the continent through a number of recommendations. These include, *inter alia*, 'the institutionalisation of academic diaspora policy in the African countries through the establishment of offices or government structures dedicated to diaspora affairs or the formulation of specific policies and regulations to facilitate their involvement' (European Commission 2015:4).

The Carnegie Corporation of New York's (CCNY) African Diaspora Fellowship Programme aims at enhancing the development of higher education and knowledge production on the African continent through linking African academics in the diaspora and those on the continent. Foulds and Zeleza (2014:16) argue that

many African diaspora academics have established vibrant, albeit largely informal, engagements with individuals and/or institutions across Africa. Ranging from research collaborations to curriculum development and graduate student supervision, these engagements are often frustrated by institutional and attitudinal barriers, on both sides of the Atlantic.

The CCNY programme aims to facilitate the hosting of academics from the United States and Canada with educational development projects in public or private higher education institutions in a number of CCNY partner countries in Africa. The first two years of the project saw the hosting of more than a hundred America-based African academics in African institutions. The National Research Foundation in South Africa and the ESRC in the United Kingdom have established the Newton Fund for collaborative research. While the fund is not limited to Africans based in the West, it provides an opportunity for Africans and diaspora across the continent to work together in developing knowledge production in African higher education. Furthermore, the fund facilitates the engagement of academics in the United Kingdom with those on the African continent through such research collaborations. According to the project founder Dr Paul Zeleza, the Carnegie Corporation of New York Programme is further being expanded to implement a '10/10' initiative aimed at supporting 10,000 diaspora academics across the world to partner with African universities over a 10 year period (MacGregor 2017).

Potential Caveats in Diaspora Engagement: Personal Reflections

As noted, diaspora collaboration demands constant reflection on the partnership process by all partners involved. In this section I critically assess research partnerships between African diaspora and academics in the African subregion. This reflexive exercise is based on research projects of which I was part as both a member of the African diaspora and of the African academe. I unpack the following three challenges which, if well managed, could enhance the role of diaspora in African higher education development: ensuring fair participation in designing a research agenda, ensuring win-win conditions for partnering, and being cognisant of contextual realities in the home country.

Establishing the Research and Knowledge Agenda: Who Decides and Why?

External partners' proximity to the donor funding organisations often results in a skewed relationship, usually in favour of partners in the diaspora. Donors generally dictate and frequently change their research agendas without considering the views of partners on the African continent; rather, they communicate with partners in the West, who are invariably also the holders of donor funding.

As an African academic in the diaspora, my experience of working with colleagues on the continent highlighted the often-unfair partnerships, with African-based academics largely treated as second-tier academics. My experience was based on a co-supervision project with an African academic. On reflection, I realised that the African-based academic was not involved in the design of the research project. Hence, his opinion regarding core aspects of the research was never sought. Although the research subject was in his area of expertise, his knowledge of the institutional and ethical processes for conducting research in the homeland was largely taken for granted. Furthermore, with most African countries experiencing various levels of political dictatorship or strong political control, the political sensitivity of some research areas needs to be taken into consideration when designing research projects in partnership with African-based academics.

Additionally, there was no clearly established agreement from the outset as to what knowledge output or benefit the partnership would produce for each member in the collaboration. While the academic in the homeland university hoped for some (financial or non-financial) benefit, such as publication or financial remuneration, such an agreement was not established at the start of the research process and ultimately resulted in the African-based academic or institution being coerced into a partnership in which there was no agreed win-win arrangement.

Reflecting on such experiences of partnership between African academics and those in the diaspora, Teferra (2009) argues that research partnerships and collaborations must be fair and equal. While we cannot deny that Africa's intellectual and financial capacity for research and knowledge creation remains weak and somewhat marginalised (Teferra 2004), both partners should engage in creative ways to ensure fair and equal participation, not only in deciding the area of research but also the process and methodologies involved. Although most funding continues to come from Western partners and funders, African academics need to develop better ways of contributing to the research process conceptually and empirically. Furthermore, African governments have the mammoth task of committing a minimum of 1 per cent of their national gross domestic product to investment in higher education (World Bank 2010), so providing a platform for developing the research capacity of African universities.

While research partnerships and collaborations between Africans on the continent and their counterparts in the diaspora have the potential to advance the quality and quantity of knowledge production in Africa and increase the academic visibility of local institutions, such collaborations need not be paternalistic, thus keeping African scholars and scholarship 'in its perpetual childlike state' (Moyo 2009:32). For this to be achieved, African scholars and scholarship need the required financial, moral and cultural support and confidence to forge productive partnerships with colleagues in the diaspora.

Towards a Win-Win Arrangement?

The significance of who sets the research agenda was observed in another project funded by a major development partner in Africa. In the project, which involved academics across four African countries, it was observed that the process of setting the research agenda resulted in a power interplay between academics in the African diaspora and those on the continent. Whether in the diaspora or on the continent, those who had stronger political and economic leverage with the external funders appeared to exert more influence on the research agenda, authorship, timelines and deadlines, while those with less connections with funders seemed to serve more as data-collecting partners. In another study of diaspora partnerships, Talbot (2011) notes this comparative advantage, stating that those in the diaspora, usually in the global North, feel they have some power over their partners on the African continent. One of the respondents in Talbot's study, based in the global North, observes that, 'Given the fact that we are here and they are there, and the funders talk to us, there will inevitably be some sort of power differential between us' (2011:18). However, Bolay (2010) argues that in linking foreign aid to research partnerships,

especially through diaspora collaborations, the needs of the partners in the South need to be prioritised. I argue further that African-based academics need to understand and assert their roles in such partnerships and not accept the passive roles of being implementers and data collectors.

Relevance of Cultural and Political Context in Research Collaboration

A third caveat in engagement between African-based academics and those in the diaspora is the need for diaspora-based academics to understand the local cultural, political and socioeconomic conditions in which African-based academics operate, both within the higher education system and in the broader sociopolitical context. While the focus is usually on joint research collaborations and partnerships, based on conditions laid down by funders, there is also a need to understand the local context in which the knowledge creation takes place, the political constraints in ensuring academic rigour and the potential implications for African-based academics once their colleagues from the diaspora have left. Especially in repressive political regimes, some research findings, if not carefully managed and communicated, could result in negative personal and professional consequences for African-based academics.

In a collaboration I had with an Africa-based academic, the political context in her/his country was such that research related to political activism was perceived in binary terms: it supported either the ruling regime or the opposition. Being the diaspora partner, I was unaware of this political context and ignorant with regard to the limited autonomy of African academia compared to that in the diaspora, as well as to the linkages between what happens within the university and the broader political terrain. My subsequent analysis and writing up of the data was immediately perceived as aligning with the political opposition, thus potentially attracting negative academic and even socioeconomic repercussions for my collaboration partner. It was thus necessary to rephrase some of the key findings and conclusions to ensure that while the findings were clearly communicated, they did not jeopardise the livelihoods and academic and professional development of local participating academics. Datta and Sigdel (2016), in identifying eight tips for North–South research collaboration, emphasise the need for researchers from the North to understand what is relevant to the South-based collaborator. They show that most researchers from the North fail to consider the constraints that local research teams are under when they write up research reports or provide feedback on such reports. They argue that researchers who take research partnerships seriously need to spend time with local partners to understand the local context, constraints and challenges involved in the process.

Concluding Thoughts

This article highlighted that knowledge production in Africa continues to lag behind that on other continents. However, the quantity and quality of knowledge production in Africa can be greatly enhanced by fostering diaspora partnerships between African-based academics and those in the diaspora. However, a number of challenges exist for both partners in the collaboration. A growing body of research on Western partners' or diaspora-based academics' views on collaborative efforts reveals a significant number of demotivating and limiting factors to effective collaboration. These include contextual challenges related to culture, bureaucracy, lack of academic autonomy, limited resources and the political repression characterising African-based scholarship (Assié-Lumumba 2006; Cloete, Bailey, Pillay, Bunting and Maassen 2011; Teferra 2004). Diaspora-based academics need to learn from earlier successes and challenges to negotiate better forms of engagement with African-based academics to enhance knowledge production, its application and the ultimate development of the African continent. As argued by Zeleza (2002), diaspora-based academics should take academic leave and sabbaticals to develop and create projects that will enable them to spend time in Africa to contribute to supporting local academic efforts while also understanding local contextual realities for successful partnerships.

Some African-based academics may feel frustrated by the way they perceive that their diaspora-based partners approach them or treat them in the research process. The latter tend to assume a superior research culture and rigour, and often have an aura of dominance and control due to their close links to funders, ignorance of local cultural and sociopolitical constraints and lack of a win-win approach to research. African-based academics thus have the responsibility to ensure research agreements and partnerships produce a win-win situation. They also have a duty to educate academics from the diaspora, as well as local authorities and systems, about the importance of healthy forms of partnership built on mutual respect and objectives. African governments need to align with foreign donors and local development organisations such as the AAU, as well as with initiatives for diaspora partnerships such as CODESRIA and CCNY, to acquire the financial and infrastructural resources needed for such collaborations. Unless these challenges are addressed, knowledge benefits from diaspora collaboration will continue to remain ad hoc at best and largely costly to the African partners.

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