



# Advancing Collaboration between African Diaspora and Africa-Based Scholars: Extracts of Interviews with Selected African Diaspora Scholars<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

A considerable number of African scholars who have migrated to the West have done so due to upheavals in their home country's economy, poor working conditions, political instability, and a lack of academic freedom and autonomy in their homeland's higher education systems, many of which are in the process of decolonisation/indigenisation. Drawing on the experiences of four African diaspora scholars – experts in the domains of social sciences and humanities, engineering and education – who visited and collaborated with the Doctoral Programme in Higher Education Studies at the University of the Western Cape's Institute for Post-School Studies in 2017, this article explores the range of motives for their migration to Western institutions. The article also investigates the importance of the academic diaspora's contribution to teaching and research in both the West and in Africa, concluding that African diaspora scholars and Africa-based scholars are interdependent when it comes to empowering global science.

**Keywords:** African diaspora, brain drain, brain circulation, collaboration, Carnegie Corporation of New York

## Résumé

Un nombre considérable de savants africains qui ont migré vers l'Occident, l'ont fait à cause de bouleversements dans l'économie de leur pays d'origine, de mauvaises conditions de travail, de l'instabilité politique, et du manque de liberté et d'autonomie académiques dans les systèmes d'enseignement

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supérieur de leur patrie, dont beaucoup sont en cours de décolonisation/d'indigénisation. S'appuyant sur les expériences de quatre chercheurs de la diaspora africaine – spécialistes dans le domaine des sciences humaines et sociales, du génie et de l'éducation – qui ont collaboré au programme de doctorat dans les études supérieures à l'Institut des études postsecondaires de l'University of the Western Cape en 2017, cette étude examine les diverses motivations de leur migration vers les institutions occidentales. Ce document examine en outre, l'importance de la contribution de la diaspora académique à l'enseignement et à la recherche dans les pays occidentaux et en Afrique, et conclut que les savants de la diaspora africaine et les savants basés en Afrique sont interdépendants dans le domaine de l'habilitation de la science mondiale.

**Mots-clés :** diaspora africaine, fuite des cerveaux, circulation des cerveaux, collaboration, Carnegie Corporation de New York

## Introduction<sup>2</sup>

Research has shown a strong correlation between the African brain drain to the West and the fundamental constraints that dominate the majority of African states (see Mkandawire 2011; Zeleza 2013). At least four reasons stand out for the intellectual migration from the continent to other areas of the globe. First is the concept of the economy, which creates two geographical localities, the dominant North and the dominated South. The former region comprises most economically wealthy countries whose governments provide basic goods and services (health, education, shelter, security) for their citizens at a low cost (see Sen 2012). However, this does not occur to the same degree in the majority of countries geographically located in the global South (mainly Africa), where access to basic services is generally reserved for the dominant economic elite. The economic perspective sees brain drain from Africa as a conscious search for better living standards. Secondly, political instability and *coup d'états* have shaped African governance and politics. Civil wars in many African countries subsequent to African independence in the 1960s led to many academics based in those countries fleeing Africa in search of more peaceful environments elsewhere. Third, the continent's general lack of intellectual autonomy or academic freedom is an essential push factor in the brain drain to the West. The search for intellectual freedom and tertiary institutions governed by autonomy has motivated scholars from Africa to reconsider their professional futures in Africa and move to the West instead (see Mamdani 1993, 2007; Mkandawire 2011). Fourth, given that modern universities in Africa (and, for that matter, the model of state that African countries pursue) are an inheritance of colonialism, they tend to be associated with the country that colonised each nation-state, and are considered strange and alien to the continent. However, these issues are not all-encompassing

and cannot necessarily account for all cases of migration from the continent. An analysis of the individual views that instigated the mobility of highly respected African scholars in specific countries will add to our understanding of the subject of African diaspora scholars.

## **Research Methodology**

This article systematically conceptualises the African intellectual diaspora and its relevance, with a special focus on the brain drain. It is based on interviews/conversations with four distinguished African diaspora scholars who collaborate in various ways with the Doctoral Programme in Higher Education Studies (DPHES) at the Institute for Post-School Studies (IPSS) of the University of the Western Cape. Three of the African diaspora scholars visited the IPSS/DPHES and directly engaged with faculty and students; one contributed long distance from the United States (US). The face-to-face interviews took place in 2017; the long-distance correspondence was done through an inquiry form via email. The remainder of this article is divided into two parts. We first outline the profile of the academics and their journey into diaspora. Then we offer extracts from the conversations we held with the scholars on various subjects, including:

- i) what they think the diaspora contributed to their intellectual development that would not have been the case if they had remained in Africa;
- ii) whether being in the diaspora created a social distance from Africa;
- iii) what they think necessitated collaboration between African diaspora scholars and scholars in African universities;
- iv) what they think should be the most relevant agenda for collaboration between African diaspora scholars and Africa-based scholars;
- v) what they think African universities and scholars in the diaspora, respectively, stand to gain from collaborating;
- vi) their opinion of Paul Zeleza's (2013) finding that there is tension in the relationship between Africa-based scholars and African diaspora scholars, and how this tension undermines the relationship;
- vii) African diaspora scholars' views on the notion that when programmes on collaboration are established, they are usually one-way and bring African diaspora scholars to African universities, while Africa-based scholars have no opportunities to visit their colleagues in Northern universities; and

- vii) what they think can be done to enhance collaboration, apart from the African Diaspora Support to African Universities platform created by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). The African diaspora scholars provided their insights and experiences on these issues and made suggestions for future improved collaboration between African diaspora scholars and Africa-based scholars.

The interviews conducted with the African diaspora scholars aimed to identify knowledge gaps, conceptual challenges, dilemmas and opportunities to strengthen the collaboration between African diaspora scholars and African universities. Overall, the study sought to gain insight into real experiences of academic engagement between African diaspora scholars and those based on the African continent, in an attempt to assess how they can mutually benefit from the exchange of knowledge, skills and financial and social capital. The findings provide policy-makers, researchers and students with new perspectives on the possibilities and means by which different stakeholders can engage diaspora resources.

### **Profiles of African Diaspora Scholars**

#### ***African Diaspora Scholar A-1 (ADS-1)***

A-1 is a professor of African studies at the University of Basel, Switzerland. He was born on 21 December 1964 in João Belo (now Xai-Xai in Gaza province) in the Portuguese colony of Mozambique. He first studied in Maputo and then completed two master's degrees: an MA in translation and interpreting at the University of Salford, Manchester, in 1988, and an MA in sociology and social policy at the University of North London (now London Metropolitan University) in 1992. Subsequently, he completed a PhD (in 1997) and a 'Habilitation' PhD (in 2009) in general sociology at the University of Bayreuth, Germany. A-1 has held various fellowships, including at the University of Bayreuth as a postdoctoral fellow, at the Center for African Studies of the University of Lisbon and as an Agora fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg (Institute for Advanced Study) in Berlin. Since October 2009, A-1 has been working as an assistant professor with tenure at the University of Basel. He also heads the university's Center for African Studies. A-1 researches and teaches in the sociology of religion, technology, knowledge and politics. His current research deals with the politics of the rule of law and comparative development studies. A-1 participated in the African Diaspora Support to African Universities programme in March 2017. He assisted in developing the curriculum for the new DPHEs and runs methodology seminars with the doctoral and postdoctoral research fellows at the IPSS.

### ***African Diaspora Scholar B-2 (ADS-2)***

B-2 is an associate professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Program in Science, Technology, and Society. He was born and brought up in a small village near Harare, Zimbabwe. He did most of his primary and secondary education in Zimbabwe. After completing an MA in history at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in 1999, he taught at the University of Zimbabwe until 2002. By then he had started a PhD in history at Wits, while also applying to universities in the US. He wanted to study something that would help him answer the question: 'Why, in the scientific and technological map of the world, does Africa not exist?' The narrative of Africa's technology as absence bothered him. He wanted to study how science and technology is studied in the West, while also digging deeper into African history to understand the trajectories of both. His goal was set: he wanted to return to Africa and set up his own institute to reverse the notion that all knowledge is Western and that all Africans know is fable and primitive. He was interested in grassroots, even rural-focused, institutes where making and doing, not written knowledge, are the central examinable components. He was admitted to two universities in the US: Case Western Reserve University in Ohio (history of medicine) and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (science, technology, and society and African history). He chose the latter. After completing his degree, he received many employment offers, including from Duke and Colgate universities, but chose MIT because of its emphasis on innovation and entrepreneurship, and because he would be teaching humanities and social sciences to engineering students. By then he had already begun working with the Makuleke community in Limpopo province in South Africa to document, photograph and video-record their oral knowledge and indigenous knowledge of plants.

### ***African Diaspora Scholar C-3 (ADS-3)***

C-3 is a researcher in science, technology and innovation. He is also a teaching fellow in innovation studies, both positions currently held at the Science Policy Research Unit (SPRU) of the School of Business, Management and Economics at the University of Sussex, United Kingdom (UK). He joined the University of Sussex in 2011. In addition to research and teaching, he supervises PhD and MSc students, and co-convenes the innovation systems module at SPRU. He is the coordinator of SPRU's Africa Engagement Programme. Alongside research and teaching, C-3 is involved in active policy work and also provides consultancy positions. He is currently working with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in developing training modules for policy-makers. He is also involved in the monitoring

and evaluation of the African Union Commission's Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA-2024). He is a senior associate consultant at Techno-policy and was a lead consultant for KPMG. He has also held the position of a senior research associate at the University of the Virgin Islands Research and Technology Park Corporation, providing consultancy services on research, technology and innovation, and public policy. His country experience includes: the UK, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, US Virgin Island, Kenya, Botswana and Namibia. He is a visiting fellow at the University of the Western Cape and the University of Pretoria, South Africa; TaSTI: Research Centre for Knowledge, Science, Technology and Innovation Studies, University of Tampere, Finland; Centre for Policy Analysis and Studies of Technology, Tomsk State University, Russia; and the Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa. After completing a bachelor's degree in Nigeria, his journey into the diaspora and academia started with the desire to get the best possible postgraduate studies, and work with the best minds in the field. This led him to an MSc in Belgium, an MBA in the UK and a PhD, also in the UK.

### ***African Diaspora Scholar D-4 (ADS-4)***

D-4 is an associate professor at the University of Newcastle, Australia. She has been working in the field of education since 1989. D-4 has taught at every level from primary and adult basic education and training to research education programmes, PhD and postdoctoral fellows. Her earliest teaching was during the education crises in South Africa in the late 1980s, working with matric students, many of whom had not attended classes for some time, in a project called the People's Education Programme; the principles of this programme still affect what she does today. D-4's university work has spanned enabling/foundation programmes, English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS), academic language and learning, and lecturing within the School of Education. D-4 has lived and worked in Australia, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman and regularly taught programmes in Singapore. Her fields of expertise include all levels of academic literacy development, including academic integrity, teaching English to speakers of other languages, higher education, online learning and English for academic purposes. She has supervised six PhD students in the fields of education, applied linguistics and media. D-4 has held a number of leadership positions, including associate dean of the Faculty of the Professions and director of researcher education at the University of Adelaide, director of studies at two ELICOS centres and numerous coordinator positions. She is currently deputy director at the English Language and Foundation

Studies Centre at the University of Newcastle. D-4 emigrated to Australia in July 2001. She returns every two to three years to visit relatives, attend conferences and present as an invited speaker in the country.

### **Criteria for Selecting Interviewees**

Considering that the interviews were conducted in a conversation format, this study did not follow classic social science research methods for data collection. We purposely selected interviewees from the African diaspora who were visiting fellows and who participated in the design of the DPHEs, as well as others with whom we engaged after the implementation of the programme. In 2017, we hosted eight scholars in the IPSS. Of those, four were based in Africa; the remaining four were African diaspora scholars based elsewhere. The conversations cited in this article were with the visiting diaspora scholars. We were not concerned with issues of sampling since the main objective was not to make either inferences or extrapolations, but to share the individual life stories and diaspora trajectories and obtain experiences through dialogue. The conversations took place in an interview format and the four selected scholars shared their visions, experiences and prospects for future collaboration in support of African universities in general and the DPHEs in particular. We present significant extracts of the conversations in order to identify knowledge, insights, conceptual challenges, dilemmas and opportunities for strengthening the engagement with African diaspora. Furthermore, the article presents fresh insights into real experiences of academic engagement between Africa-based and African diaspora scholars in an attempt to mutually benefit from the exchange of knowledge, skills, and financial and social capital.

### **Extracts of the Conversations**

In the diaspora we become professional Africans, or professionals on Africa.  
(ADS A-1, 2017)

**HOSTS:** Can you provide us with details on your personal, academic and intellectual trajectory or journey into the diaspora?

**ADS A-1:** I left the continent many years ago, to be precise in late 1980s for studies first in Britain but then I returned back after my studies to work for the embassy in Mozambique. However, for personal reasons I left the embassy for Germany, where I lived most of the time. I have been in Europe until 2009 when I moved to Switzerland. Now in a sense, my trajectory is not a normal one as a diaspora scholar. I left my country not

because of political persecution or anything like that. I took advantage of the chances which were made available to me by the circumstances of life. I have always been interested in social sciences; I come from a different background, translation and interpretation, so when I was working either as a diplomat or supporting diplomats I studied sociology and social policy and it was on the basis of that master's programme which I pursued in London that made it possible for me to undertake doctoral studies in Germany. Now I think perhaps for the purpose of what we are talking about here, I think especially in the social sciences, if you are an African scholar you are almost like condemned to studying Africa, so there is no way in which you know you could fly higher than that, if I can use that metaphor. You become an expert of your own continent and often your skills in the discipline in which you were trained are not recognised as such unless if you can bring them to bear on Africa. So, I think my experience of being in the diaspora is very much shaped by that, is almost like a frustration that I have, that I do not get recognition beyond my competence, my skills in Africa. Of course I know there are colleagues who value my sociological skills and I know that and we communicate on that basis, but generally speaking most of us in the diaspora are condemned to becoming professional Africans.

Everything about the diasporic existence is entrepreneurial...the diaspora is not paved in gold and platinum. (ADS B-2, 2017)

**ADS B-2:** A new window into things. You are able to get up in the clouds and see the world below and up there from above the clouds – more than a bird's-eye view. You land the other side of the oceans, and you begin to see things in a horizontal dimension. The diversity of cultures, how other people do things, what works for them, what is missing. You start adjudicating, comparing home and your new surroundings, which you will also call home while there. You start appreciating how folks here make [the] most out of little. You travel the countryside and appreciate how beneficiation occurs on the farm-little factories, every farmstead. You go camping on July 4th and appreciate how Americans love their country. During Veterans Day you appreciate how they honour their military and veterans. On Memorial Day they descend on cemeteries to honour their ancestors. You read about the witches of Salem, Massachusetts, or the seers or sorcerers people consult in Brooklyn, New York. Then you realise that culture is the cornerstone of every society. Perspectives like that – and the daily struggles of trying to make it in a foreign country – make you stronger. Everything about the diasporic existence is entrepreneurial – you hear the stories



of people without papers, who know that if stopped by a cop that may be the last time they see their son, daughter, wife, husband and lover. You experience men and women who were big people back home – managers, engineers, lecturers, accountants, etc. They come here and cannot get a job. They join the ranks of CNAs [Certified Nurse Aids] working in care work, carrying for the elderly, with all that is associated with that job. The wife arrived earlier, went to school, and became a nurse; the husband arrived later, or for lack of ambition, fails to go to school, remains a CNA. Tables have turned. You have people who have become highly successful farmers – the Makarutsas of Worcester, the Mwanakas of UK, and so on. That is where Africans buy *Chibage chinnyoro* [green maize]. Some of us have small plots; we give a good Zimbabwean account of ourselves too. People with inspirational stories, people with depressing stories. Some of us were blessed to come on full scholarship, but as graduate students with a wife and a daughter, living on a maxed-out credit card became a daily existence. I remember one time living in Ypsilanti, as I completed my doctorate at Michigan, we turned the house upside down – including the sofa cushions and those crevices between frame and base springs, looking for that elusive dime [10 cents] to buy bread for our daughter, and finding none. True friends across the colour line, unforgotten heroes like Christian Williams, were sometimes the only place you could turn to. You have relatives, but they are struggling at home, and very well think you should be looking after them, since, after all, you're in America! Talk of those in the mountains asking those in the valley for heath-stones! In short, the diaspora is not paved in gold and platinum. It is a site of struggle. It is easy to see me now and marvel at the success; the untold story is the creative resilience that comes from the diaspora condition, at once the unfolding of survival against all odds that we develop while growing up poor in Africa, and yet also the risk-taking, in the full knowledge that being risk-averse is suicide.

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**HOSTS:** What do you think being in the diaspora has contributed to your intellectual academic development that you would not have been able to do if you had been in Africa?

**ADS A-1:** That is always difficult to answer but first, academic freedom is an issue in Africa, so I think it makes a lot of difference because if you live in a country where people who matter have learnt to accept the legitimacy of criticism then the chances are that they will promote that spirit in society. So, I notice, for example, that when I write anything which is

seen as highly critical about Mozambique, I get sometimes very negative response, not from politicians but from colleagues who are academics like myself. It is a different kind of intellectual environment so I think that it was important for my development having that possibility. The second reason is the chance of being challenged intellectually in a way that I would not have been in Mozambique. You know the history of sociology in Mozambique; so at the time I was growing up intellectually there would not have been many people in Mozambique with whom I could have interacted with and then develop my skills. So, I benefited from the fact that I was working and living in societies where sociology had a much longer tradition and so I could tap into those intellectual resources to develop, but having said that, I need to also clarify, of course you don't need academic freedom or critical mass to develop, it will also depend on the kind of person you are.

**ADS C-3:** Many, for example, a PhD in science and technology policy studies I obtained in the UK and the experience in STI [science, technology and innovation]/public policy-making; but also exposure that has come with the PhD qualification. I am still not aware of a PhD in Africa focused in science and technology [and innovation] policy studies, of the level and quality of SPRU. SPRU is one of the best in the world, ranked at the same level with Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard and MIT in innovation studies.

**ADS D-4:** Being in the diaspora has contributed enormously to my intellectual well-being. In South Africa, I worked mainly at a school and technikon level and did not have the time or money to pursue a PhD. Between 2003 and 2006 I had long summer holidays and had the opportunity to work at [the] United Arab Emirates. I then used the savings I made from the salary I earned to pursue a PhD. It has also given me the opportunity to work at Australian universities and attend conferences to meet with scholars from a wider range of countries than if I were in South Africa.

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**HOSTS:** Did being in the diaspora somehow create a social distance with Africa?

You can begin to idealise Africa, and you can begin to essentialise Africa just because you are being pushed into that corner. (ADS A-1, 2017)

Physical departure yes, but the heart has never left...I never came here to settle; I came to see how other nations build successful technological and scientific institutions, with a view to taking that experience and mixing it with my own ancestors' knowledge to emerge with something entirely new and wonderful. (ADS B-2, 2017)

**ADS A-1:** Oh not necessarily! As I said earlier on, you are forced to be an African so what it does perhaps is to create a special kind of relationship with Africa. It does not necessarily mean it is a healthy one. Right. You can begin to idealise Africa, and you can begin to *essentialise* Africa just because you are being pushed into that corner. You can lose the critical edge which I think as a scholar you need to keep or maintain.

**ADS B-2:** No. Physical departure yes, but the heart has never left. Perhaps because I lost over half my family – five siblings and a mother – while in the diaspora. How can you forget? You come home and all you find is an entire anthill filled up where just the father you had buried before you left once lay. Without any money, and with the political and economic situation in your country turbulent, you find refuge in your studies. You literally suspend or postpone the pain of mourning and seeking closure to the moment when you finally get home; meanwhile you pay tribute to the dead but churning your pain into the energy that drives you to finish your doctorate well ahead of schedule. That is how I ended up at MIT and beat the financial crisis of 2008 to get a job that might well have been frozen. This particular instance aside, I never came here to settle; I came to see how other nations build successful technological and scientific institutions, with a view to taking that experience and mixing it with my own ancestors' knowledge to emerge with something entirely new and wonderful. I am not defined by my itinerary or physical location in life, but by principles and reasons that caused the itineration to start with. In any case, all these inexpensive new technologies of long distance like Skype, WhatsApp, Facebook and Messenger started after I arrived here in 2003. We strategically deployed them to extend our African kinship networks across the seas, attenuating the tyranny of distance, and participating as sons, daughters, siblings, villagers and citizens back home. We brought our families back there – or those who remained of it – into our homes, their faces smiling at weddings, mourning with us as they buried our loved ones – all via cellular phones.

**ADS C-3:** Not necessarily for me. However, this could be due to the fact that I have in the diaspora lived in carefully selected multicultural cities, like London and Brussels, with many Nigerians/Africans. Plus, these cities offered relative 'closeness' to home [Nigeria/Africa]. In addition, I travel frequently to Africa for work and family visits.

**ADS D-4:** I think it is both ways. In Australia or abroad you are viewed as African and in Africa you are viewed as foreign and not belonging. I personally feel much attached to Africa, but recognise that I am viewed as socially distant when in Africa. For me the best experience is working with African scholars in Australia since I feel a strong affinity with them and understand their sense of alienation in the new context.

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**HOSTS:** In your view, what do you think has necessitated the collaboration between African scholars in diaspora and African universities?

**ADS A-1:** I think [it] is perhaps simply the lack of funding on the continent, the constraints faced by universities, governments, states and so on. It is also the realisation that diaspora scholars are [an] untapped resource. We are there but we could do more for the continent, for our colleagues and for the universities and so on. I know that the government of Ghana had a similar programme for Ghanaian scholars based in America. For example, the American academic system is structured in a way that for three months of the year people are not working and are not paid for those months so they would be doing something else. So the Ghanaian government had a programme to bring people to Ghana for those three months to do something useful to help with all sorts of things that universities need help for; right, so that is one thing. Secondly, we belong to disciplines and we have professional disciplinary associations, which have died down. Examples are the African Sociological Association, the African Association of Political Science, and the African Association of History and so on. They are not functioning right and maybe a combination of local engagement and the engagement of the African diaspora can bring those associations into life because scholarship is about debate so we will need to organise conferences and meet at those conferences and then we can organise projects together and so on so that is also something which can be done.

I applaud what CODESRIA, Carnegie and other organisations are doing to get us to come and fulfil our wishes. But as these programmes become known, fewer and fewer are getting the funding – and we are talking of a per diem and air ticket, not a salary or remuneration. (ADS B-2, 2017)

**ADS B-2:** The shift from brain drain mourning to brain banking or circulation. Mind you, some of us are products of free education subsidised by our post-independence socialist governments. Some of the loans used to enable our education were borrowed from the exact same countries that now enjoy our services. To Africa this is a double loss. So it is only fair that those who benefited must heed the call of Mother Africa. I applaud what CODESRIA, Carnegie and other organisations are doing to get us to come and fulfil our wishes. But as these programmes become known, fewer and fewer are getting the funding – and we are talking of a per diem and air ticket, not a salary or remuneration. In effect, the diaspora intellectual is applying to come back home to do national and continental service. This is a big opportunity to our governments, our companies, and our wealthy

citizens: We are here, and we are ready to come back and reverse the brain drain. All we ask for is an air ticket, ground transport, accommodation, and a little allowance for food and one or two items to keep the morale high. The universities recognise this – but they are not putting in money or showing enthusiasm to appoint us as adjunct professors, or better yet, entice us back entirely with research chairs. We don't seek preferential treatment; we prefer to return to team up with our home-based colleagues to realise dreams we have long been communicating about.

The disincentives are just too many. Africa needs to develop a robust framework for 'brain gain' from her diaspora. Brain/knowledge circulation. (ADS C-3, 2017)

**ADS C-3:** Main driver is personal desire by African scholars in the diaspora to contribute to the development in Africa. There are no incentives for us to do this. Therefore, for someone not personally interested, it is not worth the trouble. The disincentives are just too many. Africa needs to develop a robust framework for 'brain gain' from her diaspora. Brain/knowledge circulation. I am keen to work on this.

**ADS D-4:** There has been a bit of a brain drain at some African universities, with [a resulting] focus on teaching rather than research; this necessitates collaboration. Also, some African universities are underresourced. However, there are some very well-resourced African universities, mainly in South Africa, which received considerable money under apartheid and still maintain their status.

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**HOSTS:** What is the most relevant agenda for the collaboration between African diaspora and African universities?

I would think in terms of intellectual agenda. We need to establish an intellectual agenda and I think that intellectual agenda should be one that focuses on scholarship. We need to move away from the concerns of applied research, which is very important because our countries need that, but more into the concerns of basic research. (ADS A-1, 2017)

**ADS A-1:** This is a good question, I personally think. I would think in terms of intellectual agenda. We need to establish an intellectual agenda and I think that intellectual agenda should be one that focuses on scholarship. We need to move away from the concerns of applied research, which is very important because our countries need that, but more into the concerns of basic research. You know what is basic research is conceptual work, is theoretical work, we need to work on that. So the kind of intellectual agenda

I see for us all for the diaspora and for those of us here on the continent is a focus not on Africa as a problem to be solved, but a focus on finding out what knowledge produced about Africa can contribute to science, to our disciplines, to sociology, to political science, to history and so on, so that is the kind of intellectual agenda. I see Africa not as a problem to be solved but Africa as a very interesting object we can study such that we are in a position to improve our theoretical and conceptual tools in the broader social sciences.

**ADS B-2:** Establishing interdisciplinary programmes that bring together STEM [science, technology, engineering, mathematics], the humanities, arts, and social sciences, as well as the university, industry, and society together, not one as a consumer and another as producer of knowledge, or in a partnership between a rider and a horse where one carries the burden while the other enjoys the benefits, but as partners in a commune of knowledge production. Our education system is still very colonial, theoretical, and borrows too much from Western models. The question for relevance that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o laid out as a challenge for higher education and the African intellectual back in 1986, and the call for society-responsive education that Julius Nyerere made in 1966 when outlining ‘The Role of Universities’ in 1966 and 1968, both remain elusive. We are no longer even training for employment any more; we are training for unemployment. We have gone backwards when the forward step would have been to not just end with training an employable graduate, especially one who meets the needs of industry, but to train employers or employment creators. The creative resilience of those who stayed and experienced while we were gone, on the one hand, and of those who left and endured the struggles for existence in the diaspora, on the other, must be tied together into a strong note upon which the African university system can abseil into a future saturated with originality, entrepreneurship and value-creation. One without the other is a waste of time. We should look careful[ly] at how the African diaspora and the home front, as comrades-in-arms, confronted the colonial system and won. What became of the project of post-independence nation-building is another matter worthy of discussion, but historical analysis should guide us as we invent the future.

**ADS C-3:** Personally, I support and collaborate on [the] research agenda set by Africa, for example as outlined in Agenda 2063, STISA-2024, CESA 16-25 [Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016–2025], or national policies. I do not believe that diasporeans, or international development partners for that matter, should be setting the agenda for Africa or for

African countries. As diaspora, we can/should contribute to shaping or formulating the agendas. However, regardless of whether we, as scholars in the diaspora, were part of the agenda-setting or not, once a continental or national agenda is set, we have to get behind it and support it.

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**HOSTS:** What benefits do you think African universities stand to gain from collaborating with African scholars in diaspora?

**ADS A-1:** I think the benefits are enormous. Like I said earlier, the diaspora is [an] untapped resource, which African universities can rely on. Scholars based in Africa and their colleagues in the diaspora can write grant applications, embark on joint research projects, organise conferences and publish together.

**ADS B-2:** Several, but that depends on strategy. What does each university really want? Who are they inviting from abroad to think with them? Who are they sending abroad to make partnerships with overseas institutions? What role, if any, are they according the African faculty members or other Africans in those institutions, if any? Should they? What power do African universities acquire when they solicit the opinions of the African diaspora fellow? Do they even care about the African diaspora fellow as a resource for partnerships with overseas institutions, at the very least, or for ideas that these scholars may have based on their travels and everyday life and intellectual experiences abroad? I am rather sceptical, especially for so-called big institutions (I often joke about the fish that thought itself big without reflexively recognising that the pond was very small). Without naming names, some department and school heads, deans and institutional heads are letting down their illustrious individual faculty who are forging links with diaspora intellectuals. I have seen this especially in South Africa, where visiting faculty members send dozens of emails that go unanswered; when you show up at the host institution nobody is there to welcome you except the secretaries; and the best efforts of a host faculty member are sometimes sabotaged – or at least that is the impression one gets from the uncomplimentary reception. And yet at others, perhaps because the countries and universities suffer none of the ‘big fish’ complex, the faculty member does not have to struggle to get the attention of the chair, heads of schools, deans, and even vice-chancellors or rectors, who personally welcome the visiting faculty and invite advice on what they have learned from their travels and how it may help them meet their mandates. I do not think the bad experiences should be blamed on the institutions; the individuals who do that must be blamed for it. As countries like Mozambique,

Rwanda and Botswana, for example, increasingly seek out African diaspora-based intellectuals of any nationality to come and be part of their higher education initiatives, the individual attitudes of a few may affect the aspirations of an entire institution.

**ADS D-4:** African universities, especially those with fewer resources, can benefit from some of the facilities that diaspora scholars have, such as database access. Also, in some cases, the diaspora scholars have obtained wider international experience, particularly international publication, which they can contribute to African universities.

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**HOSTS:** Paul Zeleza and others have documented the perceived or existing tension in the relationship between Africa-based scholars and African scholars in diaspora, suggesting that this tension undermines a productive relationship. What is your take on this?

**ADS A-1:** Yes, I think broadly speaking Paul Zeleza is right that there is a tension. Of course, we need to look at what causes the tension. I think the main thing that causes the tension is the structural imbalance. African scholars working outside of the continent benefit from the kind of resources which perhaps African scholars working on the continent perhaps, with the exception of South Africa, do not have access to, so that creates an awkward situation. It actually reproduces the kind of relationship which European and North American scholars entertain with African scholars so it is almost patronage networks and that cannot be conducive to a good relationship. Part of the reason why the work CODESRIA does is really good is that it tries to break those barriers, so, for example, you know there is room for diaspora scholars within CODESRIA but they do not dominate CODESRIA. CODESRIA is dominated by scholars who are based here on the continent. I suppose for me, as diaspora scholar, the challenge is to be humble and not to come to the continent with the belief that I am going to teach people here, that I am going to give things to people. No, I need to be open-minded enough to approach colleagues here as peers with whom I can learn and if we do it in that spirit I presume it can work. I think Zeleza is right in the description, but we need to understand what causes that situation and we also need to know that there are institutions that are doing something about it.

**ADS B-2:** This may explain the attitude referred to in previous response above. On the one hand, mine is a story of an emerging, strong friendship with a colleague who defies the division of the Africa-based colleague as tethered to Africa and without travel experience. Here is a professor who has appointments at University of the Western Cape (South Africa) and



Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (Mozambique) and teaching in Austria. There is no time to waste when we meet; our shared interest is clear: we need to move speedily but efficiently with training a new cadre of doctoral students to address the deficiencies we see in our education system. Perhaps it is also because we recognise our mutual strengths; Prof. Langa will do something to advance my project of field-based research, problematising and problem-solving; I will return the favour as a guest professor and co-supervisor of doctoral dissertations he runs. Both will eventually become mutually reinforcing within a few years as Prof. Langa seeks to bridge the gap between university and industry, while I focus on bridging that between the two and society. The suspicions Zeleza drew out come out of a false sense of superiority some of us exhibit when we come back home, or when we who have stayed home regard ourselves as either 'closer to the source' or 'more patriotic' because we stayed while others 'ran away'. Or, when internal diasporas (Africans working in another African country) do very well in their collaborations and their 'hosts' [citizens of the host country] put unnecessary stumbling blocks in the way. But, as I indicated, these cleavages could be addressed by laying out departmental, school and university-wide guidelines for engagement, assuming that the success I have had with Prof. Langa is not always possible.

**ADS C-3:** Yes, tensions do exist. For example, colleagues in Africa, oftentimes, and sadly, see us as threats and competitors; sometimes get envious and jealous and various other tensions. Such treatment of scholars in the diaspora blocks [the] opportunity to collaborate. There are many others.

**ADS D-4:** I have seen an almost condescending attitude of some African diaspora scholars to their colleagues who have remained in Africa, as if their work is not as 'global' or 'internationally' acceptable. As someone who has worked in research education though, with PhD scholars from around the world, the African scholars are to my mind extremely advanced in research skills and theory by the time they reach the PhD level and far more so than domestic Australian students.

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**HOSTS:** Africa-based scholars often complain that in most cases when programmes on collaboration (e.g. CODESRIA) are established, it is usually a one-way direction, that is, to bring African scholars in the diaspora to universities in Africa, with Africa-based scholars having no opportunities for visiting professorships and fellowships in the Northern universities. How do you see this?

**ADS A-1:** This is a very serious problem and I have been complaining about this but on another level. I have been complaining about how difficult it is for African scholars to travel and attend conferences. Visa regulations in Europe and North America are not favourable to the development of scholarship in Africa. You know, as a scholar based in Europe I can decide spontaneously to attend [a] conference anywhere in Europe where I do not need a visa. Of course, there are countries where I need a visa but in most European countries I do not need one. That is the luxury all European scholars have, with the added advantage that most do not need visas to come to Africa but African scholars need visas to go to another African country and they need visas to go to Europe, and when it is about going to Europe, one is never sure he/she will be able to make it so that is a problem, a serious structural problem. We have been complaining about it; CODESRIA has been complaining about this particular problem. I wish to say I think it would be good if this were a two-way street, that diaspora scholars could come and that our colleagues from Africa could go where we are and work there with us. Of course, there are programmes, I mean in Switzerland, where I am based, there are programmes with resources for that, so we just need to write applications. In the past three years, I had at least three African colleagues spending a year at my university, so that is possible. Of course, I will not expect CODESRIA to make funds available for that but it might be a matter of personal honour for diaspora scholars to use those resources to invite colleagues based in Africa.

**ADS B-2:** This is correct and unfair. Long-term it is going to affect the good work that CODESRIA is trying to do. There is a way in which CODESRIA can address this: by partnering institutions like MIT, Harvard and [the] University of Michigan – there are many – that do faculty exchanges with African universities. Ironically, some of us have lamented that the MIT programme only brings African faculty to MIT ‘to learn mind and hand engineering’ but never [sends] MIT faculty to go and learn from Africans. Thus, CODESRIA could work with African diaspora scholars at such universities to persuade their institutions to partner, so that a two-way exchange becomes possible. Personally, a loan of this is informational; CODESRIA could create a position or assign a desk to creating a database of all the universities that bring African faculty abroad. Then, it can link this to its sponsorship of African diaspora-to-Africa programmes, thus addressing this problem.

**ADS C-3:** This is a complex issue, with various factors at play. Personally, I have never used any of these sorts of programmes [e.g. CODESRIA] and therefore cannot comment on them. If African scholars have problems

with programmes designed in this manner, they have the option of working with the programme owners to refine and improve them, rather than complain. Complaining might imply placing the blame on the scholars in the diaspora. I have personally invited many African scholars to the UK; however, the majority, who were not able to make it, complained of lack of funds to undertake such visits. Where and when there are funding opportunities, for example the UK's Newton Mobility funds,<sup>3</sup> the majority of African scholars I have tried to work with do not know about these funds [or] are not able to make a strong application, or various other factors make it difficult for them – organisational issues at their universities. For example, Prof. D. Walwyn from the University of Pretoria, South Africa, completed a two-month [October/November 2017] research visit to my department, on my invitation.

**ADS D-4:** Totally agreed. There needs to be an equal two-way relationship. As mentioned above, I see Africa-based scholars as contributing significantly to Northern universities in terms of knowledge and theory and diaspora scholars contributing from the resources available at the Northern universities.

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**HOSTS:** What in your view can be done to enhance the collaboration apart from the platform created by CODESRIA and Carnegie?

**ADS A-1:** Okay! I think I had already said [African] governments must do something about that, like the Ghanaian government did. I think professional associations can do that too. Well, I think scholars here on the African continent need to reach out right like you have done recently; you have invited me. I do not know if all colleagues would want to or would have time to come but I think we need to acknowledge that we are [a] resource for you. I mean maybe Europe does not need as much as you may need us, so maybe you would want to make the move.

**ADS B-2:** The most obvious starting point is a genuine consideration of questions raised about what benefits I think African universities stand to gain from collaborating with African scholars in diaspora. Once that introspection is conducted, universities will then rechannel their overseas collaborations via scholars of African descent to act as bridges to create transoceanic partnerships that avoid the colonial and neocolonial proclivities that still structure current engagement. We are past the era of saying, 'Come home and build your country.' With ICT-based platforms like cellphones and [the] internet, it is only right that we rethink our strategy as one of brain circulation. African

universities can now approach the best intellectuals anywhere in the world and work with them [regarding] ways of offering service, both while staying where they are and coming when their calendars free up. With platforms like NovoEd, MITx and edX, some components of courses can now be taught virtually from anywhere via video-conferencing or webinar, allowing us to address a problem that stifled co-curricular collaboration, viz., the clash between university calendars and the general institute requirements for credit hours and so forth. The success of such collaboration will depend on flexibility, especially on department and school heads, with a mandate from their university councils and rectors.

**ADS C-3:** Various. For instance, Africa-based scholars can improve on their ability to secure funds and attend international conferences more frequently. It is at such events that contacts are built and useful networks are created, some of which will lead to joint research grants/funding applications and eventually, more collaborative work, mobility, international exposure and long-term partnerships. I have also highlighted the need for a framework. Others include infrastructure, development of networks, linkages.

**ADS D-4:** With the ubiquity and power of ranking exercises such as the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, many Northern universities focus only on reciprocal arrangements with other highly ranked universities. This cuts off arrangements with African universities, except those [that are] highly ranked, such as the University of Cape Town. Truly reciprocal arrangements need to be made between African and, for example, Australian universities.

## **Final Remarks**

The conversation excerpts indicate that a strong case can be made for expanding African diaspora initiatives as a means to improve collaboration between Africa-based scholars and African diaspora scholars. However, as these conversations highlight with regard to the challenges faced in engaging with African universities, a more balanced and equal share of opportunities is required between Africa-based scholars and those in the diaspora. This means that the nature of their relationship should not be one of African diaspora scholars patronising their colleagues on the African continent. Rather, Africa-based scholars need more support from their diaspora counterparts. To date, collaborations tend to have been driven by the way funding opportunities and programmes are designed, which invariably promote a one-way flow of ideas, knowledge and movement

– from the global North to the South – with adverse developmental consequences for Africa in many cases. In recognition of this, it would be advisable to promote a new kind of diaspora engagement, mentality and policy, one that promotes two-way mobility and thus the circulation of both Africa-based scholars and African diaspora scholars. These are compelling motives for more investment in truly reciprocal exchanges. We are at a crossroads – today’s emerging academic exchange programmes and practices must ensure that Africa-based scholars are not simply hosts of African diaspora scholars; rather, they need to be acknowledged as equal subjects of knowledge generation through research

## Notes

1. Interviews were conducted by Patrício Langa and transcribed by Patrick Swanzy and Pedro Uetela.
2. This chapter is based on extracts from interviews with diaspora scholars conducted by Patrício Langa under the CODESRIA programme of providing support from the African diaspora support to African universities between 2015 and 2017.
3. <https://www.britac.ac.uk/newton-mobility-grants> and <https://royalsociety.org/grants-schemes-awards/grants/newton-mobility-grants/>

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