

Opinion: Envisioning Africa's Renaissance: The Critical Role of the Diaspora in Our Transcultural Future

By Dr. Menghis Bairu

The African diaspora's role in the continent's socioeconomic transformation can no longer be overlooked. As we delve deeper into the 21st century, it becomes increasingly clear that the narrative surrounding Africa's relationship with its expatriates is evolving from one of brain drain to a more dynamic dialogue about brain gain and brain circulation. This shift is crucial as Africa seeks to capitalize on its growing sectors of industrialization, infrastructure, and the creative and cultural economy.

The concepts of brain drain, brain gain, and brain circulation are critical to understanding the dynamics of the African diaspora. Historically, Africa has experienced the departure of some of its most talented individuals to countries that promise better professional opportunities and living conditions. This migration, often perceived as a loss, has been labeled as a brain drain. For instance, the World Bank estimates that over 70% of highly educated professionals from sub-Saharan Africa are currently residing in North America or Europe, a significant outflow of human capital that underscores the gravity of the brain drain issue.

However, this perspective is changing. The concept of brain gain acknowledges that the diaspora, through their acquired skills and global networks, can contribute significantly to the continent's development when they return. Furthermore, brain circulation offers a model where African expatriates can contribute their expertise without permanent repatriation, facilitating a transnational exchange of knowledge and resources that benefits both Africa and their countries of residence. According to the International Organization for Migration, remittances to Africa have tripled over the last decade, reaching nearly \$85 billion in 2021, which points to a strong diasporic contribution to domestic economies beyond just financial transfers.

At Bio Usawa, we see the African diaspora not just as expatriates but as essential partners in our mission to transform healthcare across the continent. Our strategy is twofold: to attract Africa's finest minds back to the continent to harness their talents, and to entice world-class professionals from around the globe to join our cause. The unique challenges of African healthcare provide fertile ground for innovation and growth, making it an attractive arena for those who seek to make a significant impact.

As I often mention, it's not just a matter of attracting African expatriates home. We need to share the story of the world-class opportunities that are available for world-class talent. That includes not only drawing Africa's best and brightest across borders to build our collective economy but also attracting talented professionals from developed nations who have a passion for the continent and find rewards in being challenged to build, contribute, and grow.

Africa’s burgeoning industrial and creative sectors represent fertile ground for this transcultural exchange. The continent is increasingly positioning itself as a hub for cultural richness and industrial growth, fueled by both local talent and contributions from the diaspora. In 2019, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) reported that the African diaspora contributes approximately 3% of the continent’s total GDP through direct investments in infrastructure and development projects.



In practical terms, this means creating platforms for knowledge exchange, investing in infrastructure that supports industrial and technological growth, and fostering an environment that values and cultivates creativity and cultural expression. For Bio Usawa, it means leveraging the diaspora's expertise in scientific research and global healthcare practices to innovate affordable and accessible treatments that are tailored to the needs of African populations.

The challenges, however, are significant. They include creating the right conditions to attract and retain this talent, such as stable political climates, competitive professional opportunities, and comprehensive social support systems. Moreover, there is the need to continuously engage these talents in meaningful ways that ensure their skills are effectively utilized and valued within the continent.

As we continue to build on Bio Usawa’s mission, our focus remains steadfast on harnessing the potential of the African diaspora. By doing so, we not only advance healthcare but also contribute to a broader socio-economic renaissance across Africa. This transcultural synergy is the bedrock upon which the future prosperity of the continent will be built, transforming Africa into a beacon of innovation and growth in the global arena.

The journey is undoubtedly complex, but the potential rewards are immense—not just for Africa but for the global community. As the African proverb goes, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” In this spirit, the diaspora should strengthen relationships with in-country and in-continent talents and co-lead the charge in Africa’s transcultural and developmental renaissance.