

Chapter 13

Situating the Place of Youths' between African Union and Africa Diaspora

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ABSTRACT

One of the developments in the African Union (AU) is the recognition and reconnection of Africans in the Diasporas through policy formulations and other affirmative programmes. The aim is to ensure that Africans wherever they are located can reconnect with their roots and have a true sense of identity as Africans. This is a laudable achievement on the part of AU and the entire Africans in the Diaspora. While programmes and activities aimed at bridging this gap are being fashioned out by both parties, one of the major issues that must not be ignored is the inclusion of youth in these activities. Consequently, the questions are: what is the place of youth in AU- Diaspora relations? What are the structures put in place whether at the institutional or at the Diaspora levels in ensuring that youth have a voice in the ongoing bonding process between the two parties? Providing answer to these questions in this article become pertinent at this early stage in order to carry the young ones, the future of tomorrow along in the scheme of things regarding AU and Africans in the Diaspora.

INTRODUCTION

A very apt and decisive way of beginning this discourse would be a quotation of David Mwambari (2011) on his article regarding African youth in the Diasporas. Some of his arguments are captured below:

Tell me youth of Africa in the Diaspora, when will we save the money we spend on expensive shoes or make up and use it to support the girl who misses school in Mangochi town? When will the hypocrisy of fighting AIDS transition to the use of a condom in your ever-changing relationships with strange women or men? When will we use our hard-earned income or vacation time to learn, to help a struggling uncle

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or aunt to understand accounting and book keeping for their businesses in Bujumbura? When will we spare a minute to train a nurse in Harare via a phone conference and mentor them for a year? When will we navigate our mentality that change is overnight and televised?

The caption above captures the passion of a youth challenging fellow youth on the need to be more involved in African development. Over the years, deliberations of this nature have sprung up across different spaces outside the continent emphasising on the need for youth to be alive and come with methods of intervention as Africans in the Diaspora. From these myriads of activities, some of the interesting issues coming to fore are: a. the interest of these youngsters to be identified as a group who share a relationship and a commitment to the ethos and values of African systems and traditions, b. in the process, they are doing everything within their ability to seek recognition and also mobilise fellow youth in order to contribute (irrespective of where they are) to the development of their fatherland; c. while a number of youth groups exist, there might be other youth without any affiliation to such established youth groups in the Diaspora and yet willing to connect with Africa as African youth in the Diaspora. Going by this, the questions that come to mind are: what roles is the continent playing in ensuring that these groups of youngsters spread over different parts of the continent voluntarily or otherwise play their parts towards the development of the nation? What are the strategies put in place to identify and connect youth with or without group affiliations to the continent? This and others constitute the premise for this discourse. Based on this, this discussion has set for itself the task of examining the concept of Diasporas with reference to African Union. In undertaking this, some of the success stories shall be examined; also, youth in the Diasporas vis-à-vis the kind of activities they are involved in shall be looked at as well. In addition, the paper shall scrutinize the activities of the African Union as it relates to the youth in the Diasporas. Finally, the paper shall make some recommendations regarding how AU can ensure that these young ones are recognised as individuals and as groups and also ensure that they are made to play their expected roles in taking the continent to the next level.

African Youth in the Diaspora: What is Known about Them?

One of the old theories explaining diaspora as a concept is the classical theory as developed by William Safran (1991). Some of the key issues from his theory on diaspora relates to 'distribution from a center to two or more peripheral or far-off areas; holding of shared memory, idea or legend; the belief that full acceptance by the host country is not possible, resulting in alienation and insult; regard for the ancestral homeland as the true or ideal home and place of final return; commitment to the maintenance or restoration of safety and prosperity in the homeland; and personal or vicarious relations to the homeland in an ethno-communal consciousness' (Harutyunyan, 2012, p. 4). While this theory has been subjected to a number of modifications in the course of time, this perspective of a diaspora still becomes relevant in this discourse. African youth in the diaspora are eager to connect with Africa; a quantity of them face incomplete acceptance and outright rejection in their host countries. A large number of these Africans that are not old settlers still have a strong tie with the countries of origin; their parents, siblings and friends still reside within these countries and these make it impossible to completely sever ties with their home countries.

Within African continent the term Diaspora is not a new concept. For the individuals, family relations and the national governments of the Diasporas, it suggests money pipes that drain foreign currency to them; a source of economic benefits considering the remittances that come from them. But what exactly

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