Diaspora Engagement for Internationalization of African Higher Education: Are Challenges of Public Institutions Opportunities for the Private Sector? Ayenachew A. Woldegiyorgis, Center for International Higher Education, Boston College, USA

Abstract

The concept and study of diaspora has remarkably evolved in the past three decades. Since the mid-1990s it has departed from its classic orientation of examining the ethnic, social and cultural elements of the identities of immigrant communities to analyzing the nature and role of the relationship those communities have with their countries of origin (Dufoix, 2011). The attention given to the issue, mainly by international development agencies in early 2000s, further introduced a new dimension to the area of study: the nexus between migration and development. Particular emphasis was given to the outflow and reclaim of skilled human capital through engagement schemes. As such 'diaspora engagement' became a common phrase in the lexicon of policy at national, regional and international levels (Mangala, 2017). Africa's shift of narrative from brain drain to diaspora engagement is encapsulated by AU's move to recognize the diaspora as "the sixth region of Africa" (Kamei, 2011; AU, 2012). This has created robust opportunity for the participation of African diaspora in the broader development efforts of the continent. Within this context, the limited level of engagement of African academic diaspora with institutions of the continent has started to pick (Zeleza, 2004, 2013). Nonetheless, the common frontier of diaspora engagement in public higher education institutions is challenged by multiple factors. Taking these challenges as a point of departure and drawing on data from Ethiopia, this paper explores the opportunities for private higher education institutions to better engage the academic diaspora as mediators and investors to improve internationalization.

Keywords: diaspora engagement, academic diaspora, internationalization, higher education

Knowledge Diaspora

Background

Scientific diaspora, intellectual diaspora, knowledge diaspora, academic diaspora, high-skill diaspora, scientific and technical diaspora are some of the phrases used to describe the highly educated groups in the diaspora. In diaspora studies, one of the most emphasized and debated issues in the past three decades has been the migration of educated and skilled individuals often from the so called developing to the developed countries – or as it is often referred to as brain drain.

Brain drain was seen as a catastrophe to developing countries which deters their potential development by taking away the most talented from their limited pool of human capital. Consequently, highly qualified emigrants and foreign educated students who opt to remain where they studied were perceived as a 'loss' to their countries (Dufoix, 2011). Acknowledging the high volume of skilled migration from developing countries, some prominent scholars like Bhagwati (1976) suggested that a certain form of tax should be applied in the host countries which will be used to compensate the developing countries for the loss

of their promising workforce. Several reports showed the magnitude of brain drain and its negative consequences, and proposed solutions. The World Health Organization (WHO), for instance, repeatedly reported on the migration of health professionals from Sub Saharan Africa, showing how this phenomenon is harming the region. WHO later developed the Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel, which was adopted by all its members in 2010 (Siyam & Dal Poz, 2014).

The debate on brain drain is an ongoing one (Bailey & Mulder, 2017; Commander, Kangasniemi & Winters, 2004). Critics emphasize the loss of resources invested in the trainings of skilled migrants as well as their potential contributions to the economic and social development of their respective countries of origin (Docquier, Lohest & Marfouk, 2007; Varma & Kapur, 2013). Proponents of brain drain, on the other hand, argue that in the globalized economy, the movement of skills across borders is not only inevitable but also necessary to keep low- and middle-income countries linked to the global market (Beaverstock, 2012; Lowell & Findlay, 2001). More importantly, with proper policy responses, and to a certain optimum extent, skilled migrants can be key partners in development (Bakewell, 2007; Lowell, Findlay & Stewart, 2004; Newland, 2010; Tejada, 2012; Tejada & Bolay, 2010; Wickramasekara, 2011).

Pursuant to the argument that highlights the benefits in skilled migration, since the mid-1990s brain drain analysis has slowly given room to contending notions, mainly known as brain gain and brain circulation. Brain gain is indeed an older concept which was used to describe the advantage that developed countries gained from the arrival of skilled migrants from developing countries (Dufoix, 2011). Its application in the context of the sending countries – which presents skilled migration as an opportunity for developing countries (e.g. Hart, 2006; Rahman, 2010, Rahman, 2013; Straubhaar, 2000) - can be argued, but it is not quite accurate. In trying to engage with their skilled diaspora, developing countries are attempting to reclaim returns from the investment they once made in the human capital development of their citizens. Brain circulation, on the other hand, refers to the trend that skilled migrants in developed countries engage in different ways with their countries of origin to professionally contribute in a manner that benefits the later, while maintaining their professional home base in their host country (Gaillard & Gaillard, 1997; Saxenian, 2005; Teferra, 2005). More simply, it refers to the free movement and use of expertise between the home and host countries while experts maintain their base in the host country.

The emergence of terms such as 'scientific diasporas' and 'intellectual diasporas' in the academic discourse (Kaplan, 1997; Kapur, 2001) and the advocacy for the diaspora option (e.g. Meyer et al., 1997, Tettey, 2002) as a viable alternative to counterbalance brain drain, in combination with advancements in communication technologies (Teferra, 2003; Tejada, 2012), have significantly contributed to the popularity of brain circulation and its successful transition into the policy domain.

However, it is important to note that despite the general consensus on the importance of brain circulation, there is lack of systematic and detailed evidence on the extent to which it contributes to the development of the sending countries (Tejada et al., 2014). This implies the

need for more research in the area. Meanwhile, according to reports by major international organizations, such as OECD, World Bank and ILO, the share of skilled migrants relative to the overall migrant population has been continuously increasing (Bailey & Mulder, 2017). This is happening in the face of the different policy incentives by developed countries targeting the attraction and retention of the most talented from developing countries (Boucher & Cerna, 2014; Kapur & McHale, 2005). Recognizing the combined effect of these trends – i.e. the growing knowledge gap between the global North and South, today more than ever – there is a pressing need to facilitate more brain circulation, by closely studying the cultural, social, professional and technological aspects of the movement of skilled migrants, and their engagement with home countries (Tejada, 2012; Tejada et al., 2014).

The African Academic Diaspora

In the context of the underprivileged conditions of African higher education, an even more specific type of diaspora – academic diaspora – is relevant for discussion. Academic diaspora, constituting specifically those in the academic career, can be understood as a subset of the broader skilled, scientific or intellectual diaspora.

Taking a 1999 data from the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty as a starting point, and owing to the high rate of skilled migration from the continent since (e.g. Kaba, 2009; Mpinganjira, 2011; Ogilvie, Mill, Astle, Fanning & Opare, 2007; Woldetensae, 2007), Zeleza (2013, p. 6) has been estimated that the number of African born academics working as faculty in American colleges and universities could be between 20,000 and 25,000. Seen from the perspective of African higher education institutions, this is a significant number of academics, in one of the best higher education systems in the world.

The paradox in the chronic shortage of qualified academic staff in African higher education and the increasingly growing number of African academics in developed countries is best captured by Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, a Malawian historian and a prominent scholar of African diaspora, when he noted: "The African born academic diaspora in Canada and the United States constitute the sharp edge of Africa's unusually high rates of skilled labor migration, the highest in the world for a region with the world's lowest stock of skilled workers" (Zeleza, 2013, p. 4). This contradiction is central to understanding the dynamics in the African academic Diasporas. As elaborated later, it can be argued that this is also one of the defining factors that shapes the relationship between these specific Diasporas and their counterparts back home.

The African academic Diasporas should be understood in the context of the multiplicity of their constituents which they have to engage and negotiate with (Zeleza, 2004). As academics of color, they have to survive through the complex systemic and individual challenges of the radicalized American academy. As immigrants, they have to make social adjustments while they face challenges of legal requirements, more so today than before. Meanwhile they have to find their positions in society through negotiating their relationships with the native born American society as well as Diasporas of different origins. As emigrants, they have to live with the straining demands from home, both real and imagined. This ranges from the more

personal expectation for material and moral support to family and friends to the more abstract burden of having to defend Africa, in an environment where things African are routinely demonized.

Another way to better understand the African academic Diasporas is through typologies and classifications. A compelling typology was presented by Nesbitt (2003) who outlined that his typology is underpinned by the perceived contradictions: among the African academic diasporas; between their high academic achievement and the inferior position they assume in the racially charged American higher education; and between their alienation from their countries of origin (often condemned for having abandoned their country) and the struggle and desire to come to terms with their African identity in their host societies. According to Nesbitt's typology, the *comprador intelligentsia* uses their identity as Africans to authenticate the status quo of the global order, and come as cynical towards African countries in reference to corruption, tribalism and so on. The *post-colonial critics* act as mediators between Africa and the West by interpreting the African knowledge system and experiences in the postmodernist context. The *progressive exiles*, on their part, use their position to champion a dignified place for African knowledge and they struggle to the liberation of the diaspora as well as their countries of origin. It is important to note that these typologies are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Zeleza (2004) suggests that other typologies may also be devised, two of which are considered here. A straightforward classification can be based on disciplinary orientations as humanists, social scientists, scientists, etc., which can further be specified to particular fields of specialization. This typology is practically useful to identify networks of knowledge communities (Coe & Bunnell, 2003) in the diaspora and to match them with those in Africa for collaborative engagements. Since different disciplines have their own intellectual and institutional traditions and practices, transnational engagement has the potential to be more efficient.

Another typology Zeleza (2004) proposed is based on the scope and content of the academic practices, research and publication of the academic diaspora. This way he suggested three broad groups namely the *Pan Africanists*, the *Americanisms* and the *globalists*. Those in the first group are rooted both in Africa and the US to drive their research agendas and for their publications and teaching practices. The Americanisms are, as the name indicates, focused on issues of the US, while the globalists have multiple sites of reference and practices. This typology, though unfortunately not further developed, could be useful for identifying key persons in planning and organizing engagement with African academics (e.g. Pan Africanists can be assumed to be more instrumental in engagement initiatives than the Americanisms).

Engaging the Academic Diaspora

It is intuitive that the general argument presented earlier in support of engaging high skill diaspora in the development of their country of origin works here too. African higher education institutions are in the periphery of the global knowledge system (Goujon, Haller & Kmet, 2017; Teferra, & Altbach, 2004; Visser, 2008). Nonetheless, there are positive

developments that come both from reform agendas within the continent as well as the increasingly shifting interest from the rest of the world (Jowi, 2012; Mohamedbhai, 2014; Singh, 2011; Teferra, 2010). This puts the African academic diaspora in a uniquely important position to mediate the relationship between Africa and the advanced higher education systems they belong to, towards bridging the center–periphery divide (Welch & Zhang, 2008). In reference to the increasingly positive interest the African higher education is attracting and the role of academic diaspora therein, Teferra (2010) notes that:

> *As Northern institutions and organizations seriously consider engaging with African institutions, they will often find that diaspora members are the main interlocutors in establishing such partnerships. Many Northern institutions are slowly recognizing the value of their foreign-born intellectuals in expanding their reach within a region, and are committing their own resources, while some grant-making bodies are funding institutions that are willing to engage diaspora members in such partnerships* (p. 93).

One such important force is the internationalization efforts of higher education institutions across the developed world. As Africa continues to grow economically, with its considerable young population, it increasingly becomes a target market for international higher education. (China is a very good example of this.) Hence, the African academic diaspora becomes instrumental in facilitating this shift.

The scholastic, visibility and political capital of the academic diaspora is an indispensable resource (Teferra, 2003) in the aspiration of African higher education to ascend in the global knowledge system. Diasporas also have much stronger leverage to raise resources for academic and research activities from western sources, be it their own institutions, foundations or international organizations (Zeleza, 2013). This may partly be understood as a manifestation of the bias of western institutions trusting only their own for better quality and efficiency. Nonetheless, it is clear that engaging the academic Diasporas is of unmistakable benefit to African higher education. Agunias and Newland (2012) have underscored that engaging experts in the diaspora can cut cost (some volunteer to work at no fee while others cover all of their costs. See Zeleza, 2013); linguistic and cultural competence of the diaspora adds strength to collaborative projects; and engagement could be a starting point for permanent return. The good news is that there are a number of engagement initiatives, although they are often individual and occur in fragmented manner. Amagoh and Rahman (2016) in the case of Nigeria, and Foulds and Zeleza (2014) in broader Africa have noted the considerable benefits the engagement of academic diaspora is generating. Similarly, Teferra (2010) has observed that generally there is strong interest among the diaspora to work with institutions in their home countries, because most acknowledge the benefits in professional contributions while staying close to home.

There could be different reasons for why academic Diasporas would be motivated to engage with institutions in their countries of origin. Besides the ease for international practices facilitated through familial, social and cultural ties, the burden of nostalgia is another main

factor (Amagoh & Rahman, 2016). Or as Zeleza (2013, p. 8) puts it, there are "affective, professional and ideological reasons." The affective motivations relate to the sense of guilt and obligation the highly educated diaspora carries. Further, the benefits of engagement at the individual level can be seen in light of job satisfaction and intellectual advancement (Amagoh & Rahman, 2016; Rahman, 2010; Zeleza, 2013).

Forms of Engagement

Different scholars use different approaches to analyze the forms of engagement between academic Diasporas and their countries of origin. Analyzing cases across several countries, Agunias and Newland (2012) for instance, identify three general categories based on the role of the engaged academic in the host country. (a) *Diasporas as practitioners who fill critical knowledge gaps*: This requires identifying priority areas where there is critical gap of expertise locally, and identifying experts in the diaspora in the specific field to offer them incentives and convince them to provide their services. (b) *Diasporas as partners/collaborators:* This approach promotes collaborative engagement in research and other projects between local and diaspora academics. Here institutional and professional networks are important. One example of this form of engagement, the authors noted, is the Chinese 111 project which allows top scholars in the diaspora to team up with local researchers to work in selected innovation centers across the country. (c) D*iasporas as members and leaders of scientific and technical networks*: Different countries establish networks around various scientific, technical and business issues composed of local and diaspora experts. This is often done through web based and online communication to bring together the experts to deliberate and work towards different issues of the country. There are also cases where countries establish advisory boards to government offices/departments in which diaspora academics can play crucial roles sharing their expertise.

Paul Zeleza in his 2013 study of African academics in the US and Canada used the major functions of the university – teaching, research and service – as a framework for identifying the different forms of engagement. Some of the different specifics identified under each of the dimensions of the higher education enterprise can be summarized as follows.

Table 1- Types of diaspora engagement with African higher education institutions

University Function	Types of Engagement
Teaching	student exchanges, study abroad programs, short courses, summer classes, curriculum development, supervision of graduate student dissertations
Scholarship and Professional Activities	joint research and grants, publishing and manuscript reviews, donations of books, journals and equipment, building data bases and digital archives, performance evaluations for promotion cases and as external examiners, and mentoring
Services (for Higher Education)	establishing or providing critical leadership for higher education institutions and networks including centers, institutes, foundations, and universities

Note. Adapted from "*Engagements between African diaspora academics in the US and Canada and African institutions of higher education: Perspectives from North America and Africa*" by P. Zeleza, 2013, Report for the Carnegie Corporation of New York, p. 10.

Zeleza (2013) also emphasized that these different forms of engagement should not be thought of separately. Often engagement, even at individual level, occurs in multiplicity of different activities with different purposes and functions, involving interaction with several different people and institutions.

Teferra (2010, pp. 91-93), for his part, used a mixed approach of the roles and specific purposes to classify engagements of academic diaspora. He identified five major forms of engagement: (i) *Joint research programs*- Expanding the limited research collaboration between Africa and the developed world can help build a critical mass of researchers in African diaspora. (ii) *Contributions to publications* – To elevate the status of local publications, members of diaspora can help by contributing articles and serving at different capacities in the publication processes. (iii) *Sharing knowledge resources* – Universities in Africa generally suffer from lack of relevant and current publications and other resources. Academics in the diaspora can be key in collecting and sharing current information in their respective fields, and can also be engaged in mobilizing knowledge resources on behalf of institutions in their home countries. This has become easier and cheaper due to recent advancements in communication technology. (iv) *Professional guidance and advice* – Members of Diasporas can be on professional advisory boards and support local academics in their activities by providing them access to their expertise and networks. (v) *Endowment programs and chairs* – Endowments and chairs are rare practices in Africa. Universities may encourage members of diaspora to establish such schemes that target on motivating local scientists and channeling resources in this unique form.

Analyses on the forms of engagement currently practiced among the African academic diaspora and elsewhere, exhibit three essential elements that need to be underscored. First, most engagement initiatives start at individual level through personal connections that might be established in professional, personal or social links (Teferra, 2010; Zeleza, 2013). These existing relationships are important resources around which formal and institutional partnerships. Striking a working balance between the personal and the institutional, and the formal and informal is important. Second, the role of communication technology is essential for any form of engagement (Amagoh & Rahman, 2016; Teferra, 2003; Zeleza, 2004). The physical and temporal divide between Diasporas and their home countries has been diminished by the use of communications technologies. Therefore, countries that make better investment in communication technology infrastructure, and institutions with better facilities are likely to reap more from the engagement of the academic diaspora. This difference can even go to the level of individuals: those who are more adaptable to the use of technology can have better access to academics in the diaspora and their resources.

Third, the important role of professional and diaspora networks is unmistakable. It has long been established that networks are instrumental in the flow of knowledge and other resources from migrants to their home countries (Findlay, 1990). Although maintaining networks is

often difficult (Meyer, 2001), they remain crucial in facilitating easy communication between experts and coordinating collaborative projects. Experts connected through professional networks can easily find each other and easily identify who to work with based on existing interactions through the networks. Cognizant of the vital benefits, Akins and White (2011, pp. 55-58) suggested a four-stage approach to managing networks of diaspora academics towards effective engagement. First is to *research* to identify members of the diaspora who are better connected and have the drive to mobilize others; second *cultivation,* is the process of creating awareness and informing of interests and initiatives; third comes *solicitation*, which is recruiting key diaspora members who can be passionately involved and be able to use their social and professional stature to mobilize others; and finally, *stewardship*, communication, feedback, measuring outputs and recognition to the work done, etc. to maintain networks and improve performance.

Challenges of Engagement: Opportunities for Private Institutions?

While it goes without saying that challenges are specific to engagement initiatives and their respective contexts both in the countries of origin and residence, researches indicate that some predicaments are common across boundaries. Infrastructural, logistical, economic, political, social and cultural factors all contribute in different ways to the challenges, as they do to the success of engagement initiatives (Teferra, 2005, 2010). Taking this into account, common challenges in engagement of academic diaspora are presented here in four major categories: focus of initiatives, institutional processes, environmental, and attitudinal issues.

Clarity of Focus: Regarding emphasizing the importance of clarity of focus in engagement schemes, Wickramasekara (2010) highlighted the need to distinguish between the euphoria in acknowledging the potential of diaspora from the practically real scope for contribution. Despite the broad consensus on the potential resources in Diasporas, their actual contribution depends on different factors, among which is the level of focus the engagement plan works with. Not everyone who belongs to the broad category of diaspora has the necessary level of sense of belongingness or the necessary preconditions in their own environment to make meaningful contributions. A common reason for initiatives to fail, according to Akins and White (2011), is their inability to identify specific individuals who champion and stick with the initiative through challenges. They call this "the 'mile wide – inch deep' versus 'inch wide – mile deep' conundrum" (ibid, p. 14). To address this, Larner (2007 p. 341) has suggested to use a proper mix of the 'alumni model' which mobilizes the mass around an agenda, and the 'overachievers model' which focuses on small number of very motivated and committed individuals who have the social and professional weight to rally others around them. Clarity of focus can also be seen with regard to prioritization of areas important to the home country.

With a considerable degree of autonomy, compared to their public counterparts, private institutions are more likely to create a clear and focused plan to recruit and engage members of the diaspora. Lack of clarity of focus has been one of the major sources of frustration for the diaspora. In Ethiopia for instance, after the coming to office of PM Abiy in 2018, his fresh approach of being accommodative of diverse political views and his open invitation for the

diaspora to join in the efforts of building the country generated a massive euphoria. The diaspora, as seen in different ways, seemed enthusiastic about the possible contribution they might have to the country they call home. Nonetheless, it was only few that turned to practical action. This is, among other things, due to the lack of clear plan as to how to engage the diaspora – as one research participant put it "we are ready, but we need to know what exactly the country wants us to do". The academic diaspora prefer a specific invitation with a clear plan, than a general call, which presumably requires them additional work in the midst of their busy life.

Institutional Processes: very often engagement of academics with African higher education is characterized by its dependence on informal and individual relationships initiated by the diaspora (Ogachi, 2016). Effective and sustainable engagement can be ensured with proper institutional infrastructure that can continually accommodate changing circumstances (Tejada, 2012). Diaspora academics have reported of their frustration in the differences between what they are promised and what they get when they arrive at African universities (Zeleza, 2013). Necessary arrangements, access to facilities, and so on are not consistently managed as expected because of lack of institutional backing. Formulating institutional level diaspora engagement plan and integrating that into the overall operations of the university is a necessary step to attract, retain and make proper use of the diaspora expertise.

This deficiency in public institutions can be related to the slow and unresponsive bureaucratic process, and its reluctance to allocate resources for diaspora engagement as an area of strategic activity. There is a notion that the diaspora comes with resources. While this is a fair point to assume, the resources might not necessarily be of financial nature, or might not be readily available at the start of the process. Therefore, there is a need to use institutional infrastructures and to allocate resources towards developing diaspora engagement, before the institution can reap the fruits of the potential benefits/resources. Private institutions are more likely to have a less bureaucratic institutional system and a more efficient decision making process, where top management – often the owners or their families – are much more accessible to the issues, and can quickly make decisions without waiting for support from the political structure, or without the risk of repercussions.

Environmental Challenges: Environmental impediments can be either in the context of the home or the host country. In the home countries, in addition to the challenges posed by the absence of clear articulation and institutional support, poor infrastructure, political issues, lack of good governance, high level of corruption, lack of rich information system, and the like are deterrents of effective engagement (Modupe, 2016). In the host country numerous environmental factors including the policies of the host country and the extent to which the diaspora member is well established have considerable bearing on their motivation and practical capacity to engage (Tejada, 2012; Tejada et al., 2014). In his 2013 study Zeleza identified that career trajectories, gender, and the pattern of diasporization are factors that largely determine the engagement of African diaspora academics in the US and Canada. Senior or tenured professors have more time, and access to resources to work with than those who are adjunct and pre-tenure who have a lot to prove. Also, those who work in large research

focused institutions with internationalization strategy are more likely and capable to engage than those in small and teaching focused institutions. Female academics, on the other hand, have to deal with additional responsibilities of motherhood and the subtle gender bias in the system. Those with traumatic experiences such as political exiles are less likely to be interested in engagement than others. It is, therefore, important to take a good account of the fact that diaspora academics work in an environment over which they do not have much control.

Attitudinal Issues: Attitude of both the diaspora themselves and of the academics in home countries can be obstacles to effective engagement. As mentioned, before it is not uncommon for the academic diaspora to show strong interest in the idea of engagement only to lack the real commitment to take it into action. Even when actions follow, it might not necessarily be driven by altruistic motives (Teferra, 2010). Engagement with Africa could be added to research projects and sabbatical plans only to increase one's competitive edge for grant or promotion, and not necessarily with a genuine interest of helping African institutions. As Nesbitt (2003) noted some African academics in the west have fallen in the trap of neo colonial mentality that simply takes everything western as a synonym for high quality. Coming from privileged higher education systems academic Diasporas may have unrealistic expectations from African institutions and colleagues.

On the other hand, a much more common and strongly held attitudinal challenge comes from the African academics at home (Agunias & Newland, 2012; Modupe, 2016; Teferra, 2005; Zeleza, 2004, 2013). First, there is the feeling of resentment towards diasporas that they have abandoned, or even betrayed, their country when things were tough (Skeldon, 2008; Zeleza, 2004). The lack of trust and insecurity that the diaspora academics would look down on those in Africa for the underdeveloped academic culture (e.g. lack of publication, conference participation, research grants, etc.) they operate in, creates another layer of friction. These compounds with the feelings that the diasporas, often sponsored by government programs or by international organizations, unfairly earn much more than the locals, although there are ample cases, like in the MIDA program, where diaspora members work only on voluntary bases or only with coverage of their basic expenses (Agunias & Newland, 2012). Modupe (2016) has documented the experiences of those who were frustrated by the attitude of academics they worked with in Nigeria who expected to make money out of each step in the interaction. The academics, as well as institutions, have unrealistic expectation regarding material resources Diasporas are supposed to bring with them. The difference in understanding as to how research grants are obtained and used, is reported to be a cause of disagreement. The friction gets to a point that it would be very difficult to make an academically honest critic of the work of colleagues in African institutions (Zeleza, 2013). All in all, it can be summarized that views on patriotism and love of country, power dynamics, and issues of material resources are at the center of these frictions posing challenges to effective engagement.

Conclusion

Engaging diaspora academics can be a crucial way to improve internationalization in African institutions. There have been ample examples where diaspora academics directly contribute to or mediate the internationalization process. Not only they can bring their expertise, but also create the path for their colleagues, their institution and funding agencies to engage with institutions in their countries of origin. However, engagement in higher education is challenged by various factors, some of which are institutional. Such institutional challenges as lack of flexibility, unresponsiveness, slow bureaucracy in decision making, etc. are naturally stronger in public institutions. Private institutions have the potential to easily fix such issues in order to tap into the possible benefits of diaspora engagement that are left unused because of the shortcomings of public institutions.

In addition to offering a more conducive institutional environment for the diaspora academic to engage with their home country, private institutions can also consider business ventures with the diaspora. A study by the IOM (2018) has reported the interest of the Ethiopian diaspora to engage and/or invest in numerous sectors including education and training. Private HEIs can actively recruit members of the diaspora with such interests, for whom they can provide the institutional infrastructure to engage in education, training and consultancy. This can be established as a separate/ independent venture, or annexed with existing institutions, for or not for profit depending on mutual interests. No doubt partnering with local institutions would make it much easier for diaspora academics to engage in such activities, without having to spend too much time physically in the country, or not having to deal with the bureaucratic structure.

Indeed, diaspora engagement particularly in the field of higher education is commonly motivated by the interest of 'giving back' which rests more comfortably with the non-profit missions of public institutions, than those of profit driven private ones. It is important to consider two points here: first, making profit and offering services (or 'giving back') are not mutually exclusive. There are models that can achieve both ends. In fact these could be even more effective as they can easily attract interest of the diaspora while being more sustainable, compared with one off projects. Second, public-private partnership among local institutions can complement the drawbacks of one another and create a more effective initiative to engage the diaspora. In effect, it involves three parties becoming a diaspora–public–private (DPP) partnership.

It is worth noting that this is an alternative to the direct investment by members of diaspora establishing their own higher education institution. There have been examples of such institutions, often working in some sort of partnership with institutions abroad, with which the diaspora investor is previously connected.

However, excessively profit driven operations by private institutions that disregard their responsibility for quality of educational provision, taints the image of the private sector overall, jeopardizing potentials for diaspora engagement. The recent unfolding of several private institutions in Ethiopia – some of them in partnership with foreign institutions and

involving members of the diaspora – violating standards and operating illegally can be an example.

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