

Executive Summary

International Conference on ‘Enfranchising the African Diaspora: Comparing Notes Across Sub-Saharan Africa’, organized by the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan and Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden, 21-22 June, 2017.

For two days of fruitful deliberations and discussions, the Conference on the theme ‘Enfranchising the African Diaspora: Comparing Notes across Sub-Saharan Africa’ has provided a platform for speaking to and about the realities of the relationship between the African homeland and its diaspora flung all over the world. It has also explored the different diasporas of African peoples that are located within the continent itself, such that we can speak of the Zimbabwean diaspora in the UK as well as the Zimbabwean diaspora in South Africa. We can speak of the Yoruba diaspora in Ghana and the Yoruba diaspora in Imo State, Nigeria. The diaspora is not, after all, far removed from the homeland. It is a vocal and visible branch of the homeland, and has always had a claim in the decision-making process in the homeland. The timeliness of our Conference, in the context of the ongoing recession in Nigeria, cannot be over-emphasized when we consider the realization, only a couple of days ago, of \$300 million by the Nigerian government from its first issue of a ‘Diaspora Bond’. Reports from the Debt Management Office are that the Diaspora Bond was oversubscribed to the tune of 130%. The truth of the matter is that the African diaspora is necessarily subscribed to the homeland, otherwise it would not be a diaspora in the first place. The question is whether, at any given time, it is over- or undersubscribed to the continent.

It is this subscription of the diaspora to the homeland that has been at issue in our Conference. It finds expression through different mechanisms, from remittances to the representations and vociferous debates that are conducted in online forums. This Conference has meditated on one of the most important ways through which the African diaspora can make its subscription to the continent even more

pronounced, for there can be nothing more powerful than political power itself, and there can be nothing more empowering than having the power directly to contribute to the process of political decision-making. This Conference has tried to apprehend the complex issues that are implicated in the question of enfranchising the African diaspora. To start with, it has been acknowledged that the diaspora is not cut off from political developments in the African homeland, but is rather involved, sometimes visibly, sometimes clandestinely, in the framing and deployment of political discourses and programmes. It has also been acknowledged that the diaspora has played and continues to play a key role in pursuing Africa’s political agenda abroad. In the Information Age, the diasporic Africans in the west, with uninterrupted access to ICTs and the Internet, are able to contribute real-time to political issues as they arise on the continent, and they mobilize offline as well, on the very streets of their host lands, to dramatize their positions on the political situation back home. In this regard, the political impact of the African diaspora is felt both at home and abroad, and it is precisely on the basis of this felt impact that even more space and scope for direct participation is being demanded, hence the topicality of our Conference.

We have raised the question of the challenges, problems, prospects, modalities, mechanisms, frameworks, possibilities, and actualities of diasporic enfranchisement. We have tried to sift out some of the finer elements of the power relations between homeland and diaspora in regard to the question of domestic political decision-making. We have analysed the actually extant roles, such as they are, that the diaspora already plays in political affairs back home, this with a view to making extrapolations as to how the granting of voting rights to diasporic Africans

could change the dynamics of the equation. We have critiqued existing frameworks of enfranchisement and the programmes of implementation thereof. We have made contributions to rethinking the nation, its boundedness and unboundedness, and indeed to rethinking the ambit and purview of citizen action in an age where distance rarely nullifies participation in political discourse and in the actual political process. We have agreed on many of these issues, and we have

disagreed on some others. We know that the debate has only just commenced; it continues, and will not end here.

In a nutshell, we have considered the question: **Who does the polling booth belong to?** And we have tried to answer this question by suggesting that: **Polling booths belong to nobody and they belong to everybody.**

Recommendations

- In countries where diaspora voting is already being implemented, governments should endeavour to sustain the practice while reviewing the processes for better outcomes.
- Countries that have acknowledged diaspora voting rights in their constitutions but have not actuated these rights should endeavour to expedite action for implementation.
- Countries that are indifferent and insensitive to matters of diaspora franchise need to reconsider their stance for the full integration of the diaspora into the electoral process.
- Where internal ethnic conflicts hamper and impede electoral processes, the internal dynamics should be addressed in order to avoid spillovers into the diaspora voting process.
- Electoral administration in Africa should harness the modalities of ICTs the better to guarantee the electoral rights of citizens at home and abroad.
- Critical attention should be paid to the relevant legislative frameworks in African countries in relation to enabling diaspora voting rights in the most comprehensive manner possible.
- There is an urgent need to stimulate public awareness and undertake consciousness-raising efforts in order to place the issue of diaspora voting rights as a topic of priority on the agenda of public discourse.
- The African diaspora should be encouraged to vigorously mobilize and advocate for its right to participate more deeply in the electoral processes on the continent.
- There is a need to deepen the African network on the study of homeland-diaspora issues, and to integrate this network with policy-making and implementation at all levels of governance.
- Due emphasis should be placed on the application of African conceptual and theoretical perspectives in the study of homeland-diaspora issues.
- Concerted and sustained efforts should be made to increase the volume and improve on the depth of data and research on homeland-diaspora relations on the continent. These efforts should include regular conferences, symposia, specific projects, and dedicated publishing outlets.
- The collaboration between the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, and the Nordic Africa Institute has to be expanded to incorporate all Africa-focused institutes and centres with an interest in homeland-diaspora matters.
- Diverse media platforms, including social media and institutional websites, will be utilized to disseminate the outcomes of the Conference on 'Enfranchising the African Diaspora: Comparing Notes across Sub-Saharan Africa'.
- There shall be a publication of the proceedings of the Conference, which should be given widespread dissemination both at home and abroad, in the shortest possible time.