African brain drain and gain, diaspora and remittances: More rhetoric than action

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Introduction

International migration has become an integral part of globalisation. A scenario being popularised, though not unanimously accepted, is ‘migration without borders’ (MWB) which, ideally, would increase the free movement of people (Pecoud & de Guchteneire, 2005). To this end, Andreas and Snyder (2000, quoted in Pecoud & de Guchteneire, 2005) argue that migration is now structurally embedded in the economies and societies of most countries because once both sending and receiving countries become dependent upon the phenomenon, it is unstoppable. In addition, in this era of globalisation, states face a dilemma because borders must be business-friendly, remaining open to international trade or tourism. As Castles (2004: 860, in Pecoud & de Guchteneire, 2005) contends, ‘migratory movements, once started, become self-sustaining social processes’. These are developments that the countries of destination in the North have recognised as they attempt to control immigration from the countries of the underdeveloped South. Despite these developments, African countries and institutions dwell on debating the pros and cons of brain drain and brain gain, diaspora, remittances and return migration in the context of national
as well as regional (read African) development, the countries being long on rhetoric and theorising, but short on tangible action programmes.

This chapter surveys symptomatic instances of the stock and flows of each member of the ‘migration quartet’ — namely brain drain/brain gain, the diaspora, remittances, and return — and then considers how African countries of emigration could best manipulate these four issues in their development agenda through appropriate actions rather than engaging in perpetual rhetoric. Among the issues that need to be analysed are the lack of bilateral agreements between the countries of origin and the countries of destination — to streamline proper utilisation of the quartet in Africa. Other issues are fiscal changes necessary in African countries to stimulate the inflow of remittances; attracting back ‘brain drain’ (converting it into brain gain), as well as others from the diaspora, to stimulate development in the continent; the lack of Africa-based research to generate information for formulating policy in countries of heavy emigration; the lack of informed policy and programmes emanating from the policies current in most African countries; the failure of African countries to engage the Washington Consensus, the World Trade Organisation and other international organisations in meaningful roles for the quartet in their development agenda; and inability of NEPAD to move beyond rhetoric to sponsoring tangible activities to ensure a positive contribution regarding the African brain drain and gain, and the roles of the diaspora and remittances in the region’s development. The chapter concludes that the onus is on the African countries to prescribe viable solutions for the region — rather than depending on the countries of the North and international organisations, and the aggressive encroachment of the emerging Asian economic powerhouses.

The quartet on everyone’s lips

Ordinary as well as scholarly discussions on international migration in or about Africa dwell on the so-called quartet of brain drain/brain gain, the diaspora, remittances and return. That much of the discussion relies on data from the countries of destination suggests that little is known about the perspectives of African countries involved with the quartet. This section sheds light on each of

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1 Previous North-based investigations of international migration include the UK House of Commons International Development Committee (see HCIDC, 2004); research on migration and poverty sponsored by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the IOM and the World Bank; Sweden’s Expert Group on Development Issues–EGDI (see Lucas, 2005); and the Global Development Network (GDN). The report of the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) makes recommendations of interest for countries of both origin and destination (see GCIM, 2005). The African Union (AU), unlike its predecessor, the