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Diaspora and collaboration for development: Speech at Africa Day Indaba Australasia and the Pacific 2024

Janet DZATOR

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Aisha Setipa: It is really lovely to have everyone joining us today this afternoon. Before I introduce our first speaker, I too would like to pay my respects to the traditional owners and custodians on the land in which we are all dialling in from. I am extremely fortunate to be living and working on the beautiful Ngunnawal and Ngambri country. And I pay my respects to elders past and present as well as extend that respect to any First Nations people who might be joining us today on this call. And especially in the spirit of National Reconciliation Week, I would also like to recognise that we are on stolen land and sovereignty was never ceded. So, yes, as Rugare mentioned, it is really lovely to hear where everyone is dialling in from. And as you can already see, we have a pretty packed program ahead of us. So, I think I will get straight into it. I first would like to welcome Dr Janet Dzator, who will be speaking on the topic of diaspora and collaboration for development. So over to you, Dr Janet.

Janet Dzator: I think you have all known my name, Janet Dzator. I always teach the pronunciation that also spells like J in my language. So, if you remember, Janet Dzator, I am from University of Newcastle. I am a senior lecturer in economics and the director of the Centre for African Research, Engagement and Partnerships. I am speaking and this is not a vote of chance, but I also like to acknowledge all the traditional owners of the lands wherever we are, guarded here in Australia for all their contribution and care for their land. The honourable African leaders that might be within us, our diplomats and head of representatives from Canberra, I acknowledge all of you, and to the University of Wollongong community and the leaders, the vice chancellor and all the senior leaders that have allowed the African union or African community to thrive there.

We thank you and all the staff that are behind all that we are doing, every person that is part of this organisation, I acknowledge all of you and the organisers of today's African Day celebration, Dr Mugumbate and all the team, all the students, volunteers. Most of the names are very, very much familiar with me or I am familiar with them, I acknowledge all of you and to all the participants from everywhere. In fact, we are wide and broad. I had a little glance through the name list, and I see a lot of our University of Newcastle or Newcastle residents represented there or people who have been our alumni. You are all welcome and thank you all for your contributions. I will also mention, I have got my husband among you, Dr Michael Dzator. Behind every successful woman, there is a man. So, thank you so much for supporting me everywhere.

And I will say greetings from the University of Newcastle, the Centre for African Research, Engagement and Partnerships, and all our leaders, our vice chancellor, our deputy vice chancellor of Global Engagement and Partnerships who supports this so much. I acknowledge all of them. I am speaking today – I have not reflected on the topic there, but the topic is about diasporan for development. So, who are we? Who are the diasporan? In fact, there are technical definitions of people who migrate voluntarily and those who are forced, but let's say we have all moved from our countries to a destination, our host country, and we all have contributions that we can make towards development, both in the country that we live in and our individual home countries.

Different ideas have been expanded or used to look at what makes people move from their home countries to wherever they are. In the early days of the seventies, this is called brain drain or skill migration. This brain drain has been used by advanced countries to attract skilled people. And it is mainly for the purpose of developing their science and technology, drive their research and development. We were all used to the word of knowledge economy, so it became brain drain or attraction of skills from other countries, became a drive for increasing growth and development in those countries. It is used to be seen as a negative impact on sending countries. But over the years, the idea has been changed and migrants or diasporans have been classified as people who are contributing some human capital. Human capital is a phenomenon where we are born as individuals.

We can do everything we can consume, that is it, participate in all economic activities, but if we have a little bit more education, we use our skills much more efficiently. So, education and health has been used to describe the improvements in people's contribution to the economy. So, when the diasporans are looked at as human capital contributors, there is a bit of switch from that negative brain drain to positive contribution to the economies where they are – not only that, there's also some ideas about the cost of having us as human capitals, wherever we are, whether in our host country or our individual home countries.

We have children or we, ourselves might go to school, we might use health services, we might use public services, etcetera, all of them classified as cost, but then we can also contribute to our home country, so there is new idea from that human capital evolution to what is called the socio-cognitive approach, and that one is looking at just classified remittances among this group. The idea has been that we come to our host country, we work, or we apply ourselves to the opportunities we have here, and we remit, for example, back home. And over the years, World Bank has come up with a great idea about how much contribution Africans have been making. In fact, over \$760,000,000 in 2018 currency units.

So diasporans have been seen as a great economic drag towards the development of our home country, too. A new evolving measure of diasporans is whether we can employ ourselves diplomatically to improve our development, both in our domestic and our host economies. How do we do that? We are voters. In Australia, there's compulsory voting. So diplomatically, if Africans are congregating at the place and our numbers are large enough, we can draw attention from politicians to pay attention to some of our needs because they will be fighting for our votes. Back home, we can also influence our politicians or people and try to educate people gently to see how we can use a diplomatic win.

Even in our host economies, we have our diplomats where we have concerns – let's say we want to go home, we want to contribute, we have finished education or something, or we want to transfer something or we come in down here and there is anything, our diplomats are there to help us so that we can be able to use our skills efficiently. So that is about, what I would call the diasporans, have been doing. I am an economist by profession, so I brought a bit of a diagram here to show you what we can do. Within economics, we talk about growth. In fact, growth can be looked at from different perspectives. The most common idea, that we are consumers from birth to death. When you are born, you do not work, but we eat, we wear clothes. When you die, you are not there, but somebody has to get all people around and resources to get that to bury you.

So, it is from cradle to the grave, we consume. Some of us in the households also, we invest in businesses. It could be our small African shop or as big as Elon Musk in the US. And then within the government, I have mentioned voting. In fact, you go to South WA, we have one of the parliamentarians as an African. She lived in Newcastle here before going. We did even have an African nominee or parliamentarian in Canberra before. So, we can have the government's role that is through regulation as representatives of government or through participation in electing our representatives as parliamentarians. Whether they are from Africa or not, we contribute to those economies.

And in terms of trade, we will look broadly at export and import. In fact, the trade component, which we call net trade, it includes all the activities of our diplomats, our expats, and everybody. So, in these four groups, that is from consumption to trade, every economy measures how they are performing. And if we talk about development, let us define it as growth plus. In fact, it is a bigger concept like sustainable development. We are looking at living standard. If our living standard is improving, we are developing. If education or any other thing that is not within these restricted definitions of growth, we will classify as development. So diasporans as we are, we can do a lot, either through our economic agency or through any social agency or any activity, first of all, to contribute to growth in our host countries, growth in our domestic economies. And if they are growing year in, year out, it compounds or build up and then we can have a comfortable development.

I will give some examples. If we look at governance, I give two examples here: we are thinking or we are celebrating Africa Day. Africa Day that has been started by our forefathers long ago. The whole idea of Africa Day is to bring Africa together because there are benefits. It is never materialised. Even though today, we are calling it the African Union, we are still independent countries. Compare us to Australia. Australia is made up of states and territories. They came together as a federation. And take US, US is also states, they came together, and they are states. Currently, you can look at Euro region, individual countries came together, and they form a bloc. There is also a francophone country within Africa who use the French currency and they – I mean, they are part of, let us call it the Pseudo-Union Day. What I want to highlight, is the idea of governance within the federal states or the integrated states is much smoother.

You can move between states in Australia. It does not matter whether you are traveling from New South Wales to Queensland. In fact, until COVID came, nobody really knows that states could put up borders and keep people out. We move quite freely, trade moves quite freely, and that happens in most of the federation or the federal states. Africa, we have African Union. We have been chipping away the idea that we can come together and form a bloc that we command respect economically, but we are not there yet. You travel to one country, then you have the visa problems. And we used to joke when we were students that the politicians said the idea and then they fly over it, then they leave the people to struggle. And if we think about trade as a vehicle for development, we can see that, in fact if African Union, the Africa 2060 or 2050 ideas we're dreaming about, if we can come together, we probably can be much more stronger and be able to promote development, and that is what some of our agency as diasporans can be. We can whisper gently and nudge our individual countries.

Even as individuals that we are here, we can collaborate and begin to open those so that we work together. Another agency I was talking about, which what I have here is using research and development. Many of us are here for ourselves, either economically or we are forced to be here. We have had so many opportunities. Can we find channels or ways and import or export those ideas back home? We have learnt Australia, for example, cervical cancer screening, a vaccine is developed here, and it has really controlled cervical cancer. Can we work together with our researchers here diplomatically, strategically, and then get research that we can do in Africa? We have so many ideas, I will come to that. STEMM, that is science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine, we have a lot of research going on there, and then the humanity and the arts and social sciences. We have things like tourism, we have teaching, we have so many other skills there, even arts. How do we promote our artisans from Africa so that we get them some exposure here?

We have celebrations which allow them to also exhibit their arts or something. We could think about all of those as vehicles or opportunities for us to work together with our community. And then we can build what we call the transcultural researchers. If we are doing that, not only researchers, it would be social, but transcultural means we have a lot of differences in culture, as countries in Africa, as regions or individuals in Australia. We do work together but can we go one step further so that what we are doing can count towards economic growth and, therefore, development partnerships for the sustainable development goals.

If we are working together, we are forming that partnership. In fact, the Sustainable Development Goals by

2030 will be gone, just like the Millennium Development Goals in 2015, but we can always work forward with the development ideas, in partnership with each other as diasporans and with people that we work with. Another issue I would like to highlight here is that culture, again, cultural change. I think we can do a little bit more by using the purple word here. We came, we saw, and we want to make a change. Where do we make the change? I was explaining the idea of Muntu, which was very nice that we work together as Africans. A Sankofa Ghanaian word, let us go to the past and pick the best that we could, which is exactly what we are doing here. In 1960 is about people, our leaders, try to form the African Union, and we are taking it into the future.

We can use all those ideas to build up. I have already been talking about economic, political, etcetera. Mental health, for example, is no longer taboo. We can see even leaders – not so long, the immediate ex-prime minister was talking about mental health. In years past, it is things that we do not talk about. We have diasporans here that are working actively in our home countries. When they came here, went back and saw that people with mental challenge abilities are treated in inhumane ways, we have had organisations that are promoting mental health activities a lot in Africa.

Youth engagement – Adjoa, you have presented on that, and I know you are still working on it, a very important issue. Our youth are trying to go outside.

Janet Dzator: So, we can contribute in so many ways. And then we have supportive structures in our home institutions, our universities, communities, they are all the same, we can use them to our advantage. And as I am talking about that, this one is an African impact projects that are multi-institutional happening. We have Curtin University and all other universities, including Newcastle University, I am part of. So, I would send this, please, if you see the PR code, if you just take a shot of it now, you can participate and have your voice in how we can strengthen diaspora in Australia. So, I would say happy Africa Day to you all and thank you all for today's afternoon for coming to make this important occasion. Thank you.

Aisha Setipa: Thank you so much, Dr Janet. So now we are on to our next speakers, Noël Zihabamwe and Matshepo Molala from the African Australian Advocacy Centre. He will be discussing the theme of Educating an Africa Fit for the 21st Century. Just a quick background on our speakers. Noël Zihabamwe is the founder and current chairperson of the African Australian Advocacy Centre, driving consultation, advocacy, research and policy for African-Australian communities. And as a human rights advocate, Noël serves as an advisory board member on the Australian Human Rights Institute at UNSW and an advisory board member at the Refugee Advice Casework Services. And Matshepo Molala is a committed anti-racist PhD candidate at Western Sydney University. She is a board member of the African Australian Advocacy Centre and a member of the Home Affairs Multicultural Women's Reference Group. She is also co-author of the report, We Belong Here: Framework for Human Rights and Equity for People of African Descent, which was a response to the report and recommendations done by the United Nations Working Group of experts who recently did a mission to Australia.

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