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Ensuring impactful and enduring contributions of Africans in Australasia and the Pacific to their home countries and continent: Lessons from Africa Day Indaba 2024

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ABSTRACT

Africa is divided into five geographic regions including East Africa, Southern Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, and North Africa. Recently, the African diaspora was recognised as the sixth region of the continent. The African diaspora population has emerged as one of the most important cohorts in Africa's development landscape. This article is an analysis of the 2024 Africa Day Indaba, a participatory forum organised by the University of Wollongong (UOW), the African Australian Advocacy Centre (AAAC), and the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP). The event was aligned to the African Union's Agenda 2063, which draws on the capacity of the African diaspora in the continent's development, among other goals. Drawing on the indaba methodology, a decolonised African research approach rooted in the African philosophy of Ubuntu, the study engaged 60 African diaspora members across Australasia and the Pacific to identify strategies for enhancing contributions to Africa's development. Key themes that emerged from the discussion included networking, collaboration, diplomatic engagement, systemic anti-racism advocacy, and intergenerational mentorship. The findings reveal the diaspora's untapped potential in driving sustainable development through remittances, skills transfer, and cultural diplomacy while confronting structural barriers such as racial discrimination and fragmented institutional support.

KEY TERMS: African diaspora, Australasia and the Pacific, Africa Day Indaba, Ubuntu, decolonised methodology, transnational development

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INTRODUCTION

Africa is divided into five geographic regions: East Africa, Southern Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, and North Africa. Recently, the African diaspora has been recognised as the sixth region of the continent, contributing to African development through remittances, knowledge transfer and cultural preservation. However, despite all these contributions, a report from the Australian Human Rights Commission shows systemic challenges such as widespread and unprecedented racial inequalities, fragmented institutions, limited engagement with Africa in the host nation, and little or no engagement with the African Union (AU) hinder the capacity of the African diaspora to maximise its full potential. The Africa Day Indaba 2024, organised by African Australia Advocacy Centre, the African Studies Association of Australia and the Pacific, and the University of Wollongong, addressed these issues. The main findings from this event highlighted the importance of networking and collaboration in diplomatic engagement, as well as addressing racism, mentorship, and role modelling with African people living and working in Australasia and the Pacific. These themes emphasise the impact and enduring contributions of Africans in Australasia and the Pacific. This article contextualises Africa Day 2024 and the AU's diaspora engagement framework, examines the indaba methodology as a decolonised African research method and its application, and presents and analyses the key findings, followed by a discussion of the implications of this for diaspora engagement policy. The conclusion provides recommendations for institutionalising diaspora contributions within the AU framework.

BACKGROUND

Africa Day: Historical and contemporary significance

The celebration of Africa day has expanded beyond the shores of the African continent. The African diaspora communities see this day as a special day to celebrate their culture, diversity, connection to their ancestral homeland as well as their voice to advocate for issues and challenges by the African diaspora community worldwide (Taiwo, 2022). This day is observed annually on May 25th every year, which symbolises the pan-African solidarity and celebrates the achievement in decolonization and economic integration commemorating the 1963 founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which was later changed to the African Union in 2002 (Chirisa, Mumba, & Dirwai, 2014). For this reason, members of the African diaspora use this as an opportunity to promote African culture. This has been an annual practice in Australia, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, where many award-winning African musicians and artists have been invited to participate. Many people from non-African backgrounds attended this event to celebrate the rich cultural diversity of the African continent.

The AU's diaspora engagement framework

In 2005, the AU formally designated the African diaspora as its 6th region, adding to Africa's other five geographic regions: South, Central, East, West, and North. This categorisation aimed to ensure that there is mutual benefit for the diaspora community and the AU in terms of engagement and to institutionalise continental development through diaspora engagement and other initiatives, such as the African Diaspora Sixth Region initiative and the African diaspora summit (African Union, 2005). This initiative has yielded positive results around engagement and connecting the African diaspora with their respective countries' diplomatic representatives in consular support and navigating complex legal challenges faced by diasporans in the Western legal system. Despite this effort, critics argue that diaspora engagement remains largely symbolic, with limited funding and bureaucratic bottlenecks stifling the positive outcome of this initiative, while others argue that this is one-sided, as the African continent benefits more but provides less support to its diaspora community (Akopari, 2020).

The Australasian and Pacific context

Australasia typically includes Australia, New Zealand, and sometimes New Guinea, while the Pacific (also called Oceania) encompasses Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. The exact definitions can vary based on context—geographical, cultural, or political. Melanesia includes Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and New Caledonia; Micronesia comprises the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands; and Polynesia encompasses Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, American Samoa, Hawaii, Easter Island, and New Zealand.

The number of African diasporas living in Australasia and the Pacific has increased significantly over the years. In Australia, the 2021 census data suggest that, over 1.3% of the Australian population self-identify as having African ancestry, which is about 400,000 people (Australian Bureau of Statistic, 2021). Similarly, the last

New Zealand/Aotearoa census data reported that roughly 16,890 people identified as having an African ancestry (Statistics New Zealand/Aotearoa, Stat NZ, 2018). It is noteworthy that both Australia and New Zealand/Aotearoa do not capture race data as part of their statistics, and this is based only on self-reported data about ancestry and country of birth. This limits the potential to understand the experiences of African diaspora who are negatively racialized and marginalised, and the potential for developing policies and targeted solutions to address their experiences. Furthermore, other countries, such as Fiji and Vanuatu do not maintain statistics about the African diaspora community. This is an area for future studies.

African diaspora communities face many challenges in their host nations, including racial inequality and under-representation in policy spaces. To address this, the African diaspora community in Australia has pioneered many initiatives in the areas of entrepreneurship, education, cultural advocacy, and academic mentorship, which has led to the creation of organizations such as the AFSAAP to connect and share ideas about African studies and Afropreneurs which serve as an incubating hub for young Africans aspiring to be entrepreneurs. Additionally, there are other initiatives, such as ARNAA the which fosters relations and collaboration among African researchers in Australia.

Afrocentric and Pan-Africanist Diaspora Theory (APADT)

Afrocentric and Pan-Africanist theories of diaspora position African-descended populations globally as integral to a broader political, cultural, and historical project aimed at reclaiming African agency, unity, self-determination, and renaissance. Unlike classical diaspora theories that often emphasise victimhood and nostalgia, APADT asserts a proactive, identity-affirming, and future-oriented role for the diaspora.

Pan-African solidarity and activism form the bedrock of this thought. From the First Pan-African Congress in 1900 to the establishment of the OAU, Pan-Africanism has promoted the idea that all people of African descent share a common history, destiny, and responsibility to liberate and uplift African peoples everywhere (Adi and Sherwood, 2003). Diasporic communities are not seen as external to Africa but as an integral sixth region, a formal recognition enshrined by the AU in 2003 (African Union, 2003).

Key cultural values such as Ubuntu emphasising shared humanity, reciprocity, and justice—and *sankofa*, meaning to look back to retrieve what is valuable for the future, serve as philosophical foundations for African diasporic engagement (Mbiti, 1969; Temple, 2010). Ubuntu stresses collective responsibility and communality, vital for forging solidarity across the African world, whilst *sankofa* calls for diasporic Africans to draw upon their historical experiences and cultural heritage to inform and guide their contributions to Africa's renaissance.

APADT, championed by scholars such as Molefi Kete Asante, emphasises the necessity for African peoples to view themselves at the centre of their own narratives rather than through Eurocentric or colonial frameworks (Asante, 2007). This epistemological repositioning enables Africans in diaspora to engage with their heritage confidently and to contribute authentically and sustainably to the development of African societies.

Zeleza (2005) argues that diasporas are not simply remnants of historical dispersal but are active agents in transnational networks of exchange economically, politically, and intellectually. Through initiatives such as the African Diaspora Development Institute (ADDI) and the AU's diaspora engagement frameworks, Africans abroad are increasingly mobilised to invest in infrastructure, advocate for Africa's interests globally, and transfer skills and knowledge to the continent.

Nevertheless, critics caution that the Pan-African project must grapple with internal diversities linguistic, national, cultural, and generational differences within the diaspora (Gqola, 2001). Unity is a goal rather than a given and requires ongoing negotiation and inclusive frameworks that recognise the complexity of African identities across the globe. Thus, APADT offers a clear lens through which Africans in Australasia and the Pacific and indeed globally can approach the task of making their contributions impactful and enduring for the benefit of both their diasporic communities and the future of the African continent.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The African diaspora in Australasia and the Pacific, though relatively small compared to those in Europe and North America, plays a crucial role in fostering development and maintaining transnational ties with their home countries. This brief literature review explores how Africans in these regions can ensure their contributions to Africa are both impactful and enduring, focusing on economic, intellectual, social, and political engagements.

Africans abroad have long supported their home countries through remittances, investments, and entrepreneurship (Maimbo & Ratha, 2005). Ratha (2011) highlights that remittances from diasporas often exceed official development aid, providing vital financial stability for families and local economies. However, Adepoju (2010) argues that beyond monetary transfers, structured investments in African businesses and infrastructure are necessary for long-term impact. In the Australasian context, Osili (2007) notes that diaspora-led ventures in agriculture, technology, and education can create sustainable growth if supported by effective policies.

The brain drain phenomenon has deprived Africa of skilled professionals, yet some scholars suggest that the

diaspora can reverse this through knowledge exchange. Mkandawire (2011) emphasises the role of African academics and professionals in Australasia in mentoring students, collaborating on research, and facilitating technology transfers. Mkandawire (2011) adds that digital platforms enable virtual engagement, allowing expatriates to contribute expertise without permanent return. However, Crush & Chikanda (2015) caution that without institutional support, such efforts remain fragmented.

Maintaining cultural ties is essential for diaspora identity and influence (Akyeampong, 2000). African communities in Australia and New Zealand sustain connections through festivals, media, and youth programmes (Arthur, 2010). These efforts help preserve heritage while fostering a sense of responsibility toward Africa. However, Pasura (2014) warns that generational disconnect among second-generation migrants may weaken long-term engagement unless deliberate cultural education is prioritised.

The African diaspora in Australasia has potential as a lobbying force for African interests (Mohamoud, 2006). Studies show that organised diaspora groups can influence foreign policy, advocate for trade agreements, and support democratic movements (Brinkerhoff, 2011). Limited political representation in host countries restricts their influence, calling for stronger coalitions with other diasporic and advocacy groups.

Despite their potential, Africans in Australasia face barriers such as limited institutional support, visa restrictions, and underrepresentation (Kufour, 2017). To enhance enduring contributions, scholars recommend formalising diaspora networks, fostering public-private partnerships, and leveraging digital tools for collaboration (Mohan & Zack-Williams, 2002).

The literature reveals several critical gaps, beginning with a limited focus on the Australasia-Pacific context, as most studies concentrate on African diasporas in Europe and North America, with minimal specific research on Australasia and Pacific regions. Additionally, none of the literature reviewed used an African centred research methods such as *indaba*. These gaps motivated this research.

Participants

This *indaba* brought together African diaspora together with over 60 participants, with about 52% female and 48% male. The attendees were drawn from different professional and educational backgrounds that contributed to the richness of the discussion and cross-sectional collaboration. The academicians formed the largest group with scholars and researchers from universities such as the University of Wollongong, the University of Newcastle, Charles Stuart University, the University of Western Sydney, Edith Cowan University, and the University of Western Australia. A diplomat representing all ambassadors of African countries was present in the *indaba* session.

METHODOLOGY

An *indaba* is a decolonized approach that originates from the Nguni people of Southern Africa, who include the Mbo, Lala, Ntungwa, Hlubi, Xhosa, Mthethwa, Ngidi, Ndwandwe, Zulu, Ngoni, Swati, and Ndebele (Keikelame & Swartz, 2019; Gilroy, 2018; Khupe & Keane, 2017). Among the Nguni, an *indaba* is a gathering for purposeful discussions often facilitated by elders to reach consensus on difficult community matters. *Indaba* has been used in research and is part of the Ubuntu research approach (Chilisa, 2019; Edward et al., 2020). This is in alignment with the African Ubuntu philosophy, which emphasizes communal dialogue and collective decision-making (Udah et al., 2025). For example, the *indaba* approach was used at the UN Climate Change Summit to reach consensus on global climate change issues (UNCOP17, 2011). In addition, *indaba* ensures that consensus is reached by the people, as opposed to traditional focus groups, where the researcher often arrives at the final decision based on individual data analysis. Unlike conventional Western methodologies that emphasize researcher neutrality, *indaba* positions participants as co-creators of knowledge, ensuring culturally relevant outcomes (Chilisa, 2019). This approach aligns with AU's Agenda 2063, which advocates African-led solutions to the continent's challenges.

The three phases of the *indaba* were opening, dialogue, consensus seeking, and closing. Besides an Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Indigenous acknowledgement to their countries and ancestors, present and future generations, no other welcome rituals were done to establish trust, communion, relationship building, and cultural grounding, as recommended by Nesbitt (2017), due to the online hosting of the event. In other *indaba*, these rituals would include drumming, singing, thanking God and ancestors, and sharing food. The co-facilitators explained the *indaba* process for the participants and shared the theme, which was 'strategies for maximising the long-lasting and meaningful impact of Africans in Australasia and the Pacific on their native countries and continent'. The participants then engaged in facilitated dialogues.

Analysis for the *indaba* data started in real time, where the rapporteur produced preliminary points from the discussion. The facilitator summarised the preliminary points to the participants who engaged in further discussion. The initial seven points from the *indaba* are presented in the Information Box 1.

Topic: How can Africans living, studying, working, and growing in Australasia and the Pacific ensure that their contributions to their home countries and continent are both impactful and enduring?

- Networking and Collaboration: involving African and Australian organisations, networks and governments and engaging in resource pooling and skill-sharing.
- A forum where Ambassadors can engage with the Diaspora community. There are 15 ambassadors from Africa in Australia, they cover not only their countries but the whole continent.
- Supporting each other, leverage our own resources, not looking externally, doing things for ourselves.
- Looking at our cultures in their heterogeneities and homogeneities and what they can bring to education in Australia, to ensure fit for purpose education.
- Building and supporting our entrepreneurs to meet our needs.
- Let's not hesitate away from speaking about racism, challenge racial discrimination.
- Mentorship and role modelling.

Information Box 1: Preliminary points from the discussion

After the *indaba* ended, the feedback was used to refine the preliminary points to create preliminary themes, which were then emailed to participants for checking, and further feedback was obtained, mainly from the co-authors who were also participants and had access to the transcripts. The co-authors then agreed to the final themes and prepared them for reporting. During the write-up, further refinement of themes occurred as writers became more familiar with the data. Methodologically, our analysis steps were partly informed by the Ubuntu research approach (Chilisa, 2019) which embraces communal, collective and participatory analysis and Braun and Clarke (2006) whose full process for data analysis include familiarising with the data, generating initial codes, generating initial themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming the themes and writing up.

FINDINGS

Five key consensus points or themes emerged from the analysis. These are networking, collaboration, diplomatic engagement, addressing systemic racism, and mentoring and role modelling. These themes are described in Information Box 2 and then discussed in turn.

Information Box 2: Consensus points or themes

Consensus point or theme	Description
Networking	Importance of creating or maintaining pathways connecting role players in ensuring impactful and enduring contributions of Africans in Australasia and the Pacific to their home countries and continent.
Collaboration	Importance of sharing resources, information and strategies for ensuring impactful and enduring contributions of Africans in Australasia and the Pacific to their home countries and continent.
Diplomatic engagement	The role and importance of diplomatic missions in ensuring impactful and enduring contributions of Africans in Australasia and the Pacific to their home countries and continent.
Addressing systemic racism	The presence of and need to address systemic racism to enable impactful and enduring contributions of Africans in Australasia to their home countries and continent.
Mentoring and role modelling	The need for mentoring and role modelling to ensure impactful and enduring contributions of Africans in Australasia and the Pacific to their home countries and continent.

Networking

Participants emphasized the need for structured platforms to unite diaspora organizations, AU missions, and the host nation governments. For example, partnerships between diplomatic missions and academic institutions have facilitated capacity-building initiatives, such as coding boot camps that enhance digital skills among African youth. This idea was supported by a participant stressing the significance of networking and collaboration in STEM and humanities encouraging partnership between the African diaspora academics living in Australasia, diplomatic mission a to increase capacity building in Africa stating:

"We have so many ideas, I'll come to that. STEMM, that is science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine, we have a lot of research going on there, and then the humanities 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?" (Participant 1).

Collaboration

Many participants have also emphasised the importance of collaboration among the African diaspora communities the area of research and entrepreneurship. This collaboration will lead to creation of innovative solution to challenges faced by the African diaspora communities in the host nation and foster knowledge exchange and resource sharing. For example, such collaboration can occur through joint research project, investment initiative, mentorship program for upcoming generations and knowledge transfer which can breach the gap leading to development product and services tailored to the specific need of African market. One of the participants say:

"By collaborating with local universities, business leaders, and corporate organisations, we can strengthen education initiatives both in Australia and across Africa." (Participants 6)

Diplomatic engagement

Some participants proposed institutionalizing annual diaspora-ambassador forums to better align diaspora initiatives with AU agendas. They suggest that culturally rooted diplomatic efforts could further elevate the role of the diaspora in national development through regular meeting and active engagement with African diaspora community by the African countries diplomatic mission in Australasia and their respective diaspora community. One of the participants echoes the importance of an event like Africa Indaba 2024 highlighting the significance for continuous engagement with the African diaspora community. As he says:

"Really, this is a very important event. Although it was organised under Africa Day, you have raised very, very important issues that will carry us forward in terms of bringing a very fundamental change in the education sector in Africa. Therefore, we would like, as ambassadors of Africa here in Canberra, to have a forum where you can engage with the African diaspora community here, with all the associations that are present today. We have only 15 ambassadors in Australia. We are very small compared to 55 countries in Africa, and yet we represent not only our bilateral interests, but also our engagement covers the African continent in general. Therefore, my recommendation on behalf of the African ambassadors in Canberra is to have a regular forum and engagement where we can exchange useful interests from our diaspora communities based here in Australia and the Pacific regions. Therefore, I would like to thank you for organising this very, very useful event. Thank you, everyone. I appreciate it' (Participant 2).

Addressing all forms of racism

Anti-Black racism has emerged as a pervasive barrier, with a significant number of participants reporting their experience of racism in different aspects of their daily lives, such as public places, in school, and at the workplace. These discrimination experiences often manifest in different forms, with some participants describing both subtle and direct encounters of racial discrimination. To address these issues, they suggested strategies, including the systematic documentation of racist practices and lobbying for AU-backed legal frameworks to counter discrimination. This aligns with the findings of the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (UN WGEPAD) during their 2023 visit to Australia, where they compared the experiences of Black African migrants to those of individuals living under the oppression of racism. Narrating the severity of these experiences, one of the participants says:

“So, the issue of racism, like the Arabs, the Lebanese, each one of them have their fair share of experience, but the difference between us and some of all these people is the difference in skin colour – they have similar skin colour, a white skin colour. But our own, the intercession plays a big role in our experience and a lot of people don't talk about it, and that's why the importance of us going out there, telling our stories, mentoring people instead of pushing this problem aside – talking to our children, talking to people, mentoring people and also telling them how we can fight this particular issue in Australia” (Participant 3)

Mentorship and role modelling

Intergenerational mentorship programs were highlighted as key to reducing attrition rates among African students and young professionals. This initiative will help established a structural framework for established professional to help the younger generation in their career journey through meaningful relationship between expert and young Africa professional, thereby providing valuable support and knowledge transfer. Furthermore, participants also underscored the need for diaspora-led scholarship and internship exchanges with African education institutions to foster the transfer of knowledge between the academician and expert in diaspora, thus making lasting and impactful contribution to the African continent. For example, Participant 4 narrated his experience as early career academic by acknowledging the impact of mentorship as she says; *“I am very grateful to my elders and seniors who have given myself and other youth opportunities to be in positions of influence to create impact. I think intergenerational mentorship and sponsorship is very beneficial”*. Another Participant also supported this idea, saying:

“Let us impact communities, support someone else to do a PhD, empower someone else in Africa, support someone to write an article, co-publish. I like the person who said that you share what you have from where you are like co-writing a paper with someone which will give them a chance of getting a PhD scholarship. Let us all use this to see how we could uplift our people. Together we have a big resource. In small ways first, not to wait to have more money or influence, don't wait that the opportunity will arrive, ok to make mistakes, everyone in Australia make mistakes” (Participant 5).

DISCUSSION

This article reports on findings from an *indaba* that was part of Africa Day commemorations in the Australasia and Pacific in 2024. The *indaba*'s main question for discussion was how Africans living, studying, working, and growing in Australasia and the Pacific can ensure that their contributions to their home countries and continent are both impactful and enduring. The key consensus points from the *indaba* were networking, collaboration, diplomatic engagement, addressing systemic racism, and mentoring and role modelling. In the context of the literature and the lived realities of the African diaspora, why do these points matter and what could be done to address the realised gaps?

By focusing on African epistemologies, such as *indaba*, this study echoes Chilisa's (2019) assertion that decolonized methodologies foster culturally sustainable solutions. For instance, the emphasis on mentorship aligns with communal values and collective uplifting, while the critique of systemic inequities resonates with Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2013) analysis of postcolonial power structures. While diaspora events such as Africa Day Indaba 2024 provide an avenue for diaspora voices, structural barriers remain. The AU has not provided adequate clarity and resources towards working with its 6th region.

Another barrier comes from host nations that still have in place restrictive policies that hinder diaspora contributions to their source continent (Baser & Féron, 2021). For example, some participants indicated that host nation for example, lack specific policy to cater for the need of African diaspora. This initiative includes family reunification and need for cross broader initiative like supporting the transfer of diaspora knowledge transfer and expertise in the developmental project in Africa (Arogundade et al., 2022).

The potential of digital platforms to streamline communication and diaspora engagement was evident in Africa Day Indaba 2024 leveraging technologies will bridge geographical gaps enabling participants from various African countries and diaspora communities worldwide to connect and collaborate in real time. This digital approach not only increased accessibility but also enhanced the diversity of perspectives and experiences shared during the event. Through virtual panels, interactive workshops, and networking sessions, attendees were able to discuss pressing issues, celebrate cultural heritage, and explore opportunities for collaboration in areas such as economic development, education, and innovation (Eden, Chisom & Adeniyi, 2024).

Racism continues to hinder progress, and many see it as the biggest challenge for African diaspora as it remains a significant obstacle to advancement among the community (Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018). Many people believe it is the most important problem that needs to be addressed. This ongoing issue prevents positive changes and improvements from occurring as quickly or effectively as they could without racial prejudice and

discrimination (Udah, 2023).

Contingent on institutionalized support and coordinated anti-racism initiatives, the African diaspora in Australasia and the Pacific's contribution to the African continent can be immense. Aligning efforts such as Africa Day Indaba with broader continental agendas could enable the diaspora to transition from "contributors" to architects of Africa's development (Hosley, 2020). To tap into this potential, we recommend institutionalizing diaspora-AU partnerships through permanent working groups, launching anti-racism task forces that will spearhead the development of legal frameworks in partnership with the AU and host nations to report and address racial discrimination, and expanding mentorship networks.

While our research used an African research method to explore this important topic, there is need for more contextualised research methods. Further, there is need for research on how second-generation Africans in Australasia engage with Africa, something our research did not address. Finally, there is need for studies comparing the African diaspora in Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Islands.

CONCLUSION

The article describes the results from African day indaba 2024 on ensuring impactful and enduring contributions of Africans in Australasia and the Pacific to their home countries and continent. This study outlined the importance of African diaspora engagement and the use of decolonised African research methods in addressing the challenges faced on the African continent, as well as the main findings. Based on the findings, the implications for policy and practice are that African diaspora communities require a stronger platform to channel their skills and resources back to develop the African continent in sustainable and coordinated ways. Furthermore, African social work values such as Ubuntu should inform these strategies to ensure that the contribution is impactful, enduring and rooted in collective responsibility to strengthen transnational ties among the African diaspora and their ancestral homeland.

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