

A New Definition and Classification of the African Diaspora

By Gibril Faal (2006)

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Defining the African Diaspora



In 2005, the African Union gave a definition of the African diaspora:

“The African Diaspora consists of peoples of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union.”

The African Diaspora as the Sixth Region of Africa

The African Union (AU) considers the diaspora to be the ‘Sixth Region of Africa’. The AU definition is inclusive, generous, politically-correct and general in nature. However, it replicates the complexities inherent in defining diasporas. It is almost impossible to implement the definition practically, but it gives a clear steer that the African diaspora need to be viewed within the context of socio-economic development.

The sovereign member states of the AU may seek to actualise the aspirations of the AU, by declaring their non-resident diasporas as regions of the country. This goes beyond the symbolic and formal acknowledgement of diaspora affinity, and recognition of their belonging to the nation-state. The diaspora as a recognised constituency and region, can be given access to a portfolio of rights and privileges available to citizens at home. These may include: tax breaks for Diaspora Direct Investments (DDI); right to vote at national elections; and the opportunity to be represented at municipal and national legislative bodies. The AU lead of recognising the diaspora as an integral part of the country of origin and heritage will stimulate and enhance productive diaspora engagement in the economy, polity and society.

The Concept of Diaspora Memory and the Classification of the African Diaspora

To have a better understanding and more practical definition of the African diaspora, it may be useful to have a framework that links African migratory history, African diasporas and contemporary socio-economic development of nation-states.

‘Diaspora Memory’ as a concept encapsulates the emotional, cultural and practical affinity people have with their countries of origin or heritage. Diaspora Memory also creates a direct correlation between present day diasporas and the historical and significant waves of African migration. I postulate that the stronger the diaspora memory, the stronger the inherent drive to contribute to development in origin and heritage countries. As such, Diaspora Memory can be used as a practical criteria for classifying the African diaspora in a manner that links diaspora to current and future socio-economic development of African countries.

***“.....the stronger the diaspora memory,
the stronger the inherent drive to contribute to development.....”***

NEW CLASSIFICATION OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

| Type of African Diaspora* | Type of Diaspora Memory | Period of Migratory Wave | Main Location Around the World |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Primordial Diaspora | Genetic Memory | Circa 100,000 BCE | All of humankind across the world |
| Prehistoric Diaspora | Anthropological Memory | Circa 50,000 BCE | Australasia, Melanesia, Andaman Islands, etc. |
| Oriental Diaspora | Historical Memory | From 8th to 18th Century | Arabia, Levant, Indian Subcontinent, Far East |
| Atlantic Diaspora | Ancestral Memory | From 16th to 19th Century | Brazil, North America, Caribbean, Latin America |
| Post-War Diaspora | Parental & Natal Memory | From 1945 to 1990 | Former European colonial countries, North America |
| Post-Cold War Diaspora | Natal Memory | From 1990 to Present | Western Europe, North America |
| Cosmopolitan Diaspora | National Memory | From 1970s to Present | African professional families in major cities across the world |

* This classification relates of the African diaspora outside of the African continent.

Using Diaspora Memory to Frame Engagement and Development Policy

- Prioritise diaspora engagement with those who have national, natal and parental memory
- Refresh memories and positive notions of nationhood and heritage for multi-generational diasporas
- Promote sense of nationhood, nationality, patriotism and enlightened transnationality
- Make it easy for diasporas to maintain and/or acquire multiple nationalities and citizenships
- Create practical mechanisms and packages to facilitate the aggregation of individual diaspora contributions
- Extract investment capital from ongoing consumptive diaspora contributions
- Create enduring and sustainable legacies from current financial and non-financial contributions.

Non-Resident Regions: Postscript to the African Diaspora Classification

Since the African Union (AU) declared in 2005 that the diaspora is the Sixth Region of Africa, it has attempted, but failed to translate the declaration into practical reality. Even the attempts to get the diaspora represented within AU structures has so far been unsuccessful. The practical suggestion made in 2006 at the 'Second Conference of African Intellectuals and the Diaspora (CIAD II), in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, was for the individual African countries to 'nationalise' this powerful notion of the diasporas as a non-resident regions. One country that took a lead in this direction was the Republic of Senegal, which in 2012 formally declared its diaspora as the Fifteenth Region of the country. In 2016, the country took a monumental leap to actualise the 'regional status' of the diaspora by allocating about 10% of the seats in its National Assembly (15 out of 165 seats) for elected diaspora Deputies. This was discussed publicly within the context of democratic rights and responsibilities, approved through a referendum, and implemented within a period of less than 18 months. On 30 July 2017, Senegal held parliamentary elections and fifteen (15) members of the Senegalese diaspora from across the world took seats at the National Assembly in Dakar, as non-resident elected parliamentarians, representing the diaspora – the non-resident Fifteenth Region of the country. Senegal has set a bold and practical example, which Africa and the world can emulate.

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