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## **Assistance and Conflict: The African Diaspora and Africa's Development in the Twenty-first Century**

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### **Abstract**

Africans in the diaspora contributed laudably to the socio-political liberation of Africa, especially in the southern Africa sub-region. A discernable feature of their involvement in Africa's political liberation efforts was that they tended to work within the boundaries of 'the agreed agenda' of African peoples and governments. With the liberation of South Africa, there has now been an obvious shift in the main agenda of 'African Liberation'. The emphasis now seems to be on democratisation and the socioeconomic development of Africa. However, the differences of opinion and the conflictive nature of the new programmes of focus require some pertinent questions, in order to chart a realistic, workable and less confrontational agenda and *modus operandi* for diaspora and continental African co-operation in the years ahead. Among other things, this paper sets in a clear historical perspective the varied ways Africans in the diaspora contributed to Africa before now. It also highlights the shift from the 'political liberation theology' to 'developmental theology'. Considering the rather sensitive and complex issues of national sovereignty, integrity and interventionism, the paper explores whether there is still a basis for diaspora Africans continuing their 'interference' in African internal business; who should set the agenda for their involvement; and how should they be involved. A fundamental conclusion of the paper is that the cooperation of diaspora and continental Africans is important in fostering Africa's development. Nevertheless, such a cooperation should respect the national sovereignty and integrity of African nations and peoples. Consultation and cooperation, rather than antagonism or confrontation between the two groups, stand as the viable and workable option.

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## Résumé

Les Africains de la Diaspora ont contribué de façon remarquable à la libération sociopolitique de l'Afrique, particulièrement dans la sous région sud Africaine. Un signe évident de leur implication dans l'effort de libération politique de l'Afrique est qu'ils avaient tendance à travailler à l'intérieur des limites des « programmes convenus » des peuples et gouvernements africains. À la suite de la libération de l'Afrique du Sud, le programme principal de « Libération de l'Afrique » a connu un changement notable. Aujourd'hui, l'accent semble plus porté sur la démocratisation et le développement socioéconomique de l'Afrique. Vu les différences d'opinions et la nature conflictuelle de l'orientation des nouveaux programmes, des questions essentielles doivent être posées afin d'organiser un plan et un mode opératoire réalistes, pratiques et moins conflictuels pour une coopération entre les Africains du Continent et ceux de la Diaspora au cours des années à venir. Entre autres, l'auteur présente dans une perspective historique claire, les diverses formes de contributions que les Africains de la Diaspora ont eu à apporter à l'Afrique dans le passé. Il souligne aussi le changement opéré pour passer d'« une théologie de libération politique » à une « théologie du développement ». Vu la nature plutôt sensible et complexe des questions de souveraineté, d'intégrité nationale et d'interventionnisme, l'article aborde la question de savoir s'il existe encore des raisons justifiant le fait que les Africains de la Diaspora continuent à « s'ingérer » dans les affaires intérieures de l'Afrique ; qui doit déterminer la nature de leurs actions et comment intervenir.

Une conclusion fondamentale à laquelle aboutit l'article est que la coopération entre les Africains de la Diaspora et ceux du Continent est importante dans la mesure où elle contribue à la stimulation du développement de l'Afrique. Une telle coopération devrait cependant respecter la souveraineté et l'intégrité nationales des nations et peuples africains. Seule l'option de la concertation et de la coopération, plutôt que celle de l'antagonisme et de la confrontation entre ces deux groupes, est viable et pratique.

## Introduction

Africans in the diaspora over the years have maintained a complex relationship with Africa. From the earlier years of resentment, abhorrence, and apathetic dispositions, some of them in later years have come to identify more positively with Africa. In these later years, in the spirit of 'racial Pan-Africanism', some of them have come to see themselves as part of a global struggle by Africans or blacks throughout the world against oppression, exploitation and sometimes socioeconomic and political marginalisation. In this connection, right from the nineteenth century, some of them articulated and sometimes executed plans that they saw as their contribution to the emancipation of the African.

In the early stages of black diaspora involvement in the continent, which came by way of black Christian missionaries going to Africa, blacks abroad decided that the 'heathens' of Africa needed to be redeemed (Jacobs 1981). Subsequent attitudes in the years of back-to-Africa movements were also anchored on the belief by blacks in the diaspora that they were going to assist Africans in the continent – and of course, pursue their own self actualisation. This attitude is easily perceptible in the plans of Martin Delany and Marcus Garvey, two major exponents of the back-to-Africa movement. In these early stages of black diaspora involvement in Africa, 'what was good for Africa' was determined by them (Erhagbe 1992a:49-61; 1992b:154-166). To a large extent, conflict between the colonisationists in the area of Liberia and their African kith and kin partly emanated from this lack of consultation (Erhagbe 1997: 65-68).

A decidedly new phase in diaspora assistance to Africa occurred during the Italo–Ethiopian crisis of 1935–1940 when there were communications between the diaspora blacks and the Ethiopians on what kind of assistance the latter expected from the former in their conflict with the Italians. Through such communications the Ethiopians were able to indicate what they expected from their diaspora brothers (Ottley 1943:109; Harris 1964:5; Ross 1975:332-33; Erhagbe 1992a: 209-210).

The precedent set in the days of the Italo-Ethiopian crisis was now followed, during the Pan-African Congress period, when the two groups held sessions to agree on an agenda, set out common positions on issues and adopt common modus operandi on how to accomplish their objectives. While Africans in the diaspora in the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) era tended to work within the boundaries of 'the agreed agenda' of African peoples and government, on a number of occasions they took the initiative, which meant they were not dictated to by Africans in the continent. Especially in the days of the socio-political liberation of Africa, especially in the southern Africa sub-region, blacks in the diaspora and their counterparts in the continent had a united agenda and voice. In this era of agreement there was less friction between the two groups. However, the situation has now changed with the transition from the politics of liberation to that of democratisation. A noticeable feature of this new phase is the lack of a united position even among Africans in the continent and more importantly, overt friction now exists between some diaspora organisations such as Trans-Africa Inc., and Africans in the continent. The issue this now raises is why is there no united voice on the part of Africans on the issue of good governance, and why is it that the former 'diaspora friends' of Africans are now being criticised for their 'undue' and unwarranted involvement in African

affairs. It is this situation that has turned assistance to conflict, but should this be the case? Can't viable working consultations be held that would help to minimise these areas of conflict? Among other things, this paper now examines in historical perspective the cooperation and assistance that continental Africans received from those in the diaspora, and from this success story, proffers some way out of the current conflict areas, because in the final analysis the two groups still need each other.

### **Nineteenth century involvement of diaspora blacks in Africa's development**

It is a well-known historical fact that, for centuries before the nineteenth, millions of Africans were victims of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the concomitant dehumanising and exploitative slavery of the Americas, the 'New World'. The nineteenth century however also witnessed concerted efforts by abolitionists to bring about the termination of the obnoxious trade and the slavery institution. Most of the countries in the New World abolished slavery in the nineteenth century. Among others, starting with St. Dominique (Haiti) in 1793, Bolivia in 1831, Uruguay 1842, Colombia 1851, Argentina 1853, Venezuela 1854, Peru 1855, USA 1865, Cuba 1886 and Brazil 1888, the slaves in these territories were set free, with Brazil being the last to accomplish abolition. In some of the countries, such as the USA, wars had to be fought to achieve the emancipation of the slaves. It was within the context of the struggle for emancipation that Africa first manifested itself in a major way in the discourse of diaspora blacks.

The fact is that most of the Africans in the diaspora, especially the generations of those that were direct imports from Africa, continued to maintain some form of attachment to their homeland, albeit only in consciousness in most cases. Their knowledge of Africa was transmitted by tradition to the later generations, thus there was never a complete break from Africa. African cultural survivals in the New World, especially in the Portuguese and Spanish territories, such as Brazil, are eloquent testimonies to the continuous contacts between Africans in the diaspora and Africa. It is therefore not surprising that in the struggle for emancipation, Africa had to feature in the discourse of diaspora blacks. It became fashionable to discuss the issue of returning freed slaves to Africa. In seeking to return diaspora blacks to Africa, there was the envisaged goal of using the returnees to spread the Christian gospel and civilisation to the 'heathen' of Africa.

The first concrete step to return Africans from the New World to Africa came through the establishment of Sierra Leone by the British in West Africa in 1808. In this enterprise, freed slaves, recaptured slaves bound for the

Americas, and the Maroons in Jamaica, formed the core of the settlers of Sierra Leone. The history of Sierra Leone with its population and culture shows how Africa served as a happy haven for returning blacks. It has been argued that it was the Sierra Leone success story that set Americans such as Paul Cuffee to pursue the objectives of sending blacks from the USA to Africa, and this idea was later actualised by the American Colonization Society (ACS) that set up the settlement of Liberia, also in West Africa. This settlement received thousands of American blacks that returned to Africa through the auspices of the ACS.

As argued by Erhagbe (1997), the ACS was actually an agency that offered blacks in the US an opportunity to develop the ideals of Pan-Africanism, but due to a number of reasons, including mistrust among the returnees and their African cousins, and the unwillingness of many US blacks to return to Africa, Pan-African cooperation could not blossom between the returnees and their cousins. As part of the envisioned mission of the ACS, Liberia was not only to serve as a home to returning Black Americans, but it was also to serve as 'a nation on the hill', that would spread Christianity and civilisation to its African neighbours. But the fact remains that due to lack of understanding of what the Africans actually wanted, and an under-appreciation of the cultural attainments of the Africans, the settlers erroneously hoped that the Africans would jump at the offer. The history of the early relations between the two groups tended to be dominated by conflict, to the extent that Ashmum in his reports saw Liberia with its stockades as a war camp. It means therefore that what could have been a fruitful relationship was greatly hindered by friction and misunderstanding. When Martin Delany in the mid-nineteenth century, within the context of black emigrationism, proposed the establishment of a settlement among the Yorubas of Egbaland around Abeokuta, there was disagreement between the people of Abeokuta and Delany on the terms of the agreement they signed that would have ceded the land to the American returnees (Erhagbe 1996b:23–24).

Thus, the early attempts of Africans in the diaspora returning to settle in Africa were marked by misunderstanding, and in the area of Liberia they actually led to outright conflict. A less conflictual area was that of blacks in the diaspora returning to Africa as Christian missionaries, as well as the case with Alexander Crummell. Some of the statements of the blacks in the diaspora about the situation in Africa tended to be in line with the prevalent Eurocentric views that saw Africa as benighted, backward, void of cultural attainments and a Dark Continent inhabited by black savages. It had to take later years of scholarship by Africanists such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter Woodson and Marcus Garvey to counter these negative views of Africa. It follows therefore that to some extent, diaspora blacks were unwilling victims of the white

jaundiced presentation of Africa. It took Delany a trip to Africa for him to better appreciate the true situation in Africa (Erhagbe 1996b:19).

The blacks in the nineteenth century therefore worked to help to evangelise Africa, but beyond that there were no other major contributions to Africa. This is because, towards the closing years of the nineteenth century, the avaricious nations of Europe set about taking over African land and imposed colonial rule on the people of the continent. Diaspora blacks responded in mixed ways to this historic happening. While some of them criticised it, the majority did not see anything wrong with it. Actually, as in the case of Booker T. Washington, he worked with the Germans in Togoland and the Cameroons (Harlan 1996:441–67). It must be added, at this point, that Washington later worked to help preserve Liberian independence in the early twentieth century (Erhagbe 1996a). Some, in addition, saw European colonisation as a blessing that would help 'liberate' Africa from barbarism (Jacobs 1981:53). Thus, when Africans in the continent were waging wars of resistance against the imperialist war machines of the Western powers, there was not much that could be done by the blacks in the diaspora to assist them. It was in the twentieth century that the diaspora blacks were to feature more positively in helping Africa.

For the most part of the nineteenth century therefore, blacks in the diaspora set the goals of what Africans needed. There was lack of communication between them, hence it was not surprising that antagonism tended to mark relations between returning Africans and their African hosts. More importantly, because of a lack of consultation, there was a misrepresentation of the true situation of things in Africa, and how the Africans saw themselves and what they needed. Some of these hindrances to black diaspora and African cooperation in the nineteenth century were removed for the most part of the twentieth century.

### **Black diaspora involvement in Africa's liberation efforts in the twentieth century**

For the most part of the twentieth century, Africans were involved in one form of emancipation struggle or the other. For the early part of the century, it was the struggle against oppressive colonial administrations, such as that of King Leopold II of Belgium in the Belgian Congo, and the discriminatory and exploitative colonial policies of the British, French, Portuguese and Germans in different parts of Africa. The protest against the negative aspects of colonialism eventually metamorphosed into the struggle for decolonisation and independence for African states. The post-independence era, especially with the dismantling of the South Africa apartheid system of race relations,

has now thrust upon Africans the struggle for good governance in African states against other sad incidence of African exploitation – that is the issue of oppressive, insensitive and dehumanising regimes. In addition, Africans are contending with the HIV/AIDS scourge that is ravaging the continent. The records are inundated with copious evidence of the positive roles which blacks in the diaspora have played in these various struggles, and are now attempting to play in the latest African struggle.

For the most part, areas of conflict were minimal in the assistance from diaspora blacks for Africa's struggle in the early phase of the struggle for emancipation, and this was largely due to the fact that there was a common external foe, and to a considerable extent there were consultations, such as came by way of congresses that were held between Africans in the diaspora and those in the continent. The situation changed towards the end of the twentieth century, with disagreements over the question of whether black diasporans' involvement in Africa still constituted assistance or was rather undue and uncalled-for interference.

Very early in the twentieth century, Africans in the diaspora joined Africans to expose the atrocities that King Leopold II of Belgium was committing in the Congo Free State, such as the amputation of the arms of Africans in order to strike fear into the workers and as punishment for minor cases of insubordination. Through the activities of diaspora blacks such as William Henry Sheppard, George Washington Williams and the American Reform Association, a chapter of the British Congo Reform Association, the public awareness and support against Leopold II was achieved in the US. Booker T. Washington was also actively involved in this movement and wrote against the Belgians in various newspapers. These black diaspora involvements in Congo went a long way to bring about the amelioration of the reactionary administration of King Leopold II (Erhagbe 1992a:113–18; McStallworth 1954, chapters 9 and 11).

In the early years of European colonial rule in Africa, the blacks in the diaspora were in the vanguard of those calling for reforms in the colonial administrative set-ups. During this early period, the protests were not for an end to colonial rule in Africa but for improvement in the colonial machinery. Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois during this period belonged to the reformist school. Even Du Bois, in the early Pan Africanist meeting that he attended, issued statements that called for reforms in the colonial system and for a system of tutelage for the Africans for some time, with the ultimate goals of self-government for the indigenous people (Erhagbe 1992a:90). By the 1920s however, with the rhetoric of Marcus Garvey, there was a gradual shift to the call for the 'liberation' of Africa from the clutches of European colonial rule.

The epitome of the consultation and cooperation of Africans in the diaspora and their cousins in Africa came by the way of the Pan African Congresses (See Geiss 1974:234–62 and Legum 1965:24–32). Through these congresses the two groups met to express their sentiments on Africa's liberation, starting with the 1900 London Conference, which was held under the auspices of an African Association founded in London by Barrister Sylvester Williams. Other congresses, such as those of Paris 1919 and the 1945 Manchester Congress, afforded Africans and descendants of Africa in the diaspora the opportunity to meet, articulate their demands, and work out the means of achieving them (Esedebe 1982). The congresses in their resolutions brought to the attention of the world the demands of Africans, both in the continent and abroad, and this stage was important to the development of those movements that brought independence to most parts of the African world. It is commonly agreed that the Pan-African congresses helped to sensitise and mobilise the Africans to struggle for their independence (Geiss 1974; Langley 1973; and Erhagbe 1992a). Thus this early stage of African cooperation with diaspora counterparts was anchored in consultation and cooperation.

It should be noted, however, that there does not seem to have been too much consultation on the part of Marcus Garvey in terms of his proposed plan for Africa. Garvey, without doubt, made very laudable contributions to the development of positive black consciousness among blacks throughout the world, and helped in the restoration of black dignity and worth (Weisbord 1973:51–88; Vincent 1973:109–36). However, in his planned political agenda of liberating Africa, and establishing a unified government for the continent, he was quite assuming. It was therefore not surprising that while Africans in the continent seemed to have welcomed his economic programme, they were not enthused by his political one, which some of them saw as attempts by Africans in the New World to wrest the political control of Africa from the Africans on the continent (Erhagbe 1992a:188–71). Typical of this last view was that expressed by William Essuman Gwira Sekyi (Kobina Sekyi) who although held a sympathetic view of Garveyism, wrote against the presumption of the New World blacks on the issue of leadership. Sekyi conceded that the 'salvation of the Africans in the world cannot but be most materially assisted by the Africans in America', however, he also strongly believed that this salvation, '... must be controlled and directed from African Africa and thoroughly African Africans' (Kobina Sekyi 1922: 24).<sup>1</sup> It follows therefore, that Africans were clear in their minds what they wanted from their cousins abroad, and 'leadership' of their states was not it.

The Italo-Ethiopian crisis that started in 1935 marked a watershed in black diaspora contribution to Africa in the years before the wars of liberation.

The crisis turned out to be a major event which galvanised both the masses and their leaders in the US into working for an African cause. When Italy planned to invade Ethiopia, it was seen as a threat to Africans both at home and abroad because of that country's symbolic importance. Hence the 'rape of Ethiopia' was seen as 'the rape of the Negro'. Like their counterparts in other parts of the world, African-Americans in their own ways made contributions towards Ethiopia's defence (Erhagbe 1992a; Weisbord 1973:89-144 and Asante 1997). An important aspect of the contribution of diaspora blacks to Ethiopia was that whereas African-Americans were thinking of mobilising troops to rally to the assistance of Ethiopia, the latter stated what it expected from the former. Ethiopian ambassador to the US, Tece Hawariat, told an *Afro-American* correspondent in Geneva that they had enough 'native soldiers' and did not therefore need American volunteers. Instead, what they needed were arms and ammunitions.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore not surprising that whereas African-Americans supported Ethiopians with medical supplies, cash and through rallies, demonstrations and newspapers, the majority never went to Ethiopia to fight. Thus communication helped to clarify the cooperation and assistance between the groups.

From the late 1930s, there was the emergence of a major group that was to offer assistance to African liberation up to the 1950s. This was the Council on African Affairs (CAA). Through the organisation, blacks in the diaspora contributed to the decolonisation struggle that culminated in the emergence of a number of independent African states in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Prominent black diasporans who at one time or another belonged to the organisation included Max Yergan, W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson and Alphaeus Hunton.

The CAA through its publications, rallies and demonstrations, and material assistance contributed to the black struggle in southern Africa, Nigeria and other parts of Africa.<sup>3</sup> It is important that during its existence, the Council established and sustained contacts with and aided the leaders of African liberation in the continent. Africans based in the US participated in the activities of the CAA. Until the 1960s, the CAA remained the most visible, vocal and vibrant African-American organisation in the US that worked to support African causes. The tactics, objectives and problems of CAA were later inherited by later American-based organisations that had Pan-Africanist aims.

The 1960s are generally seen as the years of Africa, which was when the bulk of the peoples of the continent gained their independence. In the post-independence era, the issue now arose as to what the immediate problems of Africa were. As it were, in the euphoria and optimism of independence, Africa had a lot of promise. To meet the labour needs of Africa, some diaspora blacks from the US participated in the Peace Corps Programme.

From 1962 African-American Civil Rights leaders under the aegis of the American Negro Leadership Conference on Africa (ANLCA) organised to influence the United States foreign policy for the benefit of African-Americans and Africa. To facilitate its work, this group that had amongst its membership, Martin Luther King Jr., Whitney Young Jr., Dorothy Heights, Roy Wilkins, A. Philip Randolph, and James Farmer, organised conferences on Africa, and met with members of both the executive and Legislative arms of the US government. In setting their objectives, the conferences such as that held in the Arden House Campus of Columbia University, Harriman, New York from November 23–25, 1962, consulted with all shades of opinion moulders. Interestingly, Africans from the continent participated in the conference. Their demands and resolutions were consistent with those of Africans in the continent. The consistency is attributable to the fact that at this stage in the African liberation struggle, the objectives seem to have been quite clear and non-controversial.

The ANLCA worked to create and broaden contacts and meaningful dialogue between African and American Negro leaders and to create lines of communications and contact between visiting Africans, including African students, and the American black community. A testimony to the involvement of African leaders in the organisation's activities is that the biennial conference in January 1967 was addressed by President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia. The conference criticised Ian Smith's white minority regime in Southern Rhodesia, and worked to have South West Africa (Namibia) turned over to the United Nations in its movement towards self determination and independence. It is instructive that there were consultations between the ANLCA and Africans.<sup>4</sup>

In these early stages of cooperation, a problem arose on the issue of the employment of blacks in the US Foreign Service. While African-American leaders sought to have blacks employed in the foreign services, Africans started to protest against sending such blacks to their countries since they were viewed as Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agents, and more importantly, as an underestimation of the importance of their countries by sending 'second rate citizens' without political clout to them. This area of disagreement was never resolved (Erhagbe 1992b).

More vibrant and organised support for the liberation of Africa, especially the southern flank, started from the 1970s. This period witnessed the emergence of such groups as the African Liberation Support Committee (1972–1979); Africare Inc. (1971 to date); Trans-Africa Inc. (1977 to date) and the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). Apart from the CBC, all the other groups were established with the principal aim of assisting Africa.

The ALSC in its principles and objectives set out to provide financial, material and moral support to the liberation struggles that were still being fought in southern Africa. The organisation put together rallies, demonstrations and boycotts to support African causes. Africans actively participated in the activities of the ALSC. For instance, Essiah Zhuwarara, (representative of the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe, FROLIZI), addressed the ALSC rally held in Washington DC in 1972. The 1973 rallies were attended by Ahmed Sekou Touré, nephew of President Sekou Touré of Guinea; Simpson V. Mtambanengwe, secretary for Political affairs, Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU); Sikhanyiso Ndlovu, secretary, Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU); Salvino D'Luz of the African Party for Independence of Guinea (Bissau) and Cape Verde Islands (PAIGC), and Ambassador Elhaji Abdulaye Touré of Guinea.<sup>5</sup> The participation of these Africans in the activities shows that there was cooperation between the diaspora and continental blacks. It is however important to note that while the ALSC respected the positions of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) on a number of issues, the ALSC chose to support the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), contrary to the OAU position of supporting the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). Although different reasons have been advanced for this disagreement (Erhagbe 1992a: 332–44) the fact remains that there were times of disagreement between the two groups of co-operators, but this did not result in the complete breakdown of relationships.

It was the ALSC that set the pace of demonstrations and picketing aimed at whipping up support for Africans causes in the US until the initiative was later seized by Trans-Africa Inc. from around 1977. Trans-Africa from the late 1970s has become the most visible black diaspora organisation involved in mobilising support for African causes. Working in collaboration with the Congressional Black Caucus and other groups that sought the liberation of South Africa, Trans-Africa succeeded in influencing the US government to adopt a positive policy that eventually succeeded in bringing about the collapse of the apartheid regime in South Africa and the enthronement of black majority rule. The success story of Trans-Africa in South Africa stands out as the most eloquent testimony to the assistance of blacks in the diaspora to Africa's liberation (Erhagbe 1995:86-90). Very visible in Trans-Africa's involvement in the South African case is that the organisation worked within the rubrics of the OAU, although it was neither funded nor teleguided by the OAU. Because of the impressive work of Trans-Africa, the organisation was given an observer status in the OAU, while Randall Robinson, the Executive Director of the body was invited a number of times to OAU meetings. Thus in the years of the struggle against white minority regimes in

Southern Africa, there were minimal conflictual areas between the organisation and Africans. Consultation and cooperation predominated, but the situation was to change with the new efforts of Trans-Africa to address the issue of good governance in Africa.

While Trans-Africa Inc. was involved in a collision course with some regimes within Africa, Africare Inc. seems to have avoided it. Africare Inc. has devoted itself to the socioeconomic development of Africa, without involvement in political matters. Over the years, starting with the Sahelian drought relief efforts of the late 1970s, Africare has participated in health, afforestation, animal husbandry, refugee and irrigation projects in Africa. By respecting African initiative and working with Africans instead of controlling them, Africare has helped to secure its acceptance in the different African countries where it operates. Furthermore, Africare has tended to address mainly humanitarian problems in Africa without overtly demonstrating any attempts to dabble into the politics of its host countries (Erhagbe 1992a: 16-29). Unfortunately, not all organisations could escape becoming embroiled in political issues. Hence conflict was to develop between diaspora blacks and organisations, and their African counterparts on the issue of black diaspora involvement in African affairs.

### **Causes of conflicts in assistance**

The areas of conflict between diaspora blacks and their African brothers and sisters in the continent were minimal in the years of struggle for the liberation of Africa. Again, as already stated, this was because there was an external foe, and common ground for cooperation. The situation has now changed.

With the successful dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, the African agenda has shifted to that of social and economic development of African states. Added to this is the obvious problem of the numerous internal conflicts on the continent. While socioeconomic issues have not generated too much tension, the real problem arose over the field of governance. Many observers of the fortunes of Africa have constantly lamented the betrayed dreams of African independence, the level of economic development, the utter abuse and disrespect for human rights, the corruption and authoritarian regimes that seem to dominate the African political landscape. With the common external problem of white minority regimes out of the way, Africans have now started embarking on introspective self-evaluation of African regimes. As could perhaps be expected, self-criticism has led to conflict between Africans in the diaspora and the leadership on the continent. It is important to note that there is not much ideological contest between the two groups. More to the point, the conflict seems to have arisen between the African leadership and the diaspora blacks.

The two groups are naturally at cross purposes, since while the identified authoritarian regimes want to be left alone in their 'sovereignty' to take care of their own affairs, the black groups that have been involved in African liberation feel it is still within their purview to be involved in Africa's development. Furthermore, African leaders are piqued by what they see as the unholy alliance of Africans in the diaspora working with 'racists' to undermine black independence of action. Many Africans argue that the Western press deliberately misrepresents the true situation in Africa, and that it is also deliberately working to undermine 'indigenous initiatives' attempting to chart a course for development. In this period of mutual suspicion, there is less and less consultation among the two combat groups. Rather than consult with the 'antagonist', African governments have preferred to identify new groups and individuals to work with in order to counter the negative publicity of the 'antagonist' groups. In the final analysis, this situation has now thrown a spanner into black diaspora and continental black cooperation. Furthermore, the situation exposed some blacks in the diaspora to manipulation, thereby whittling down their importance and respect from their host communities.

### **Resolving conflict and assistance: The nature of black diaspora and continental African cooperation in the twenty-first century**

The lessons of the history of the laudable contributions of diaspora blacks to Africa's development show that better results were often achieved through consultation and cooperation. This lesson is imperative for designing new programmes for the diaspora contribution to Africa in the years ahead. Groups such as Trans-Africa can still benefit from recognising and working within the parameters set by such continental bodies such as the new Africa Union (AU). Through such consultation with groups such as the AU, the two groups can agree on a common agenda, and this would prevent the assisting groups from being seen as the sympathiser weeping more than the bereaved.

While conceding that blacks in the diaspora have a right to be interested in African affairs, the fact still has to be recognised that Africans must still establish the 'authentic position' for themselves. In the absence of such working out together of a position, adversaries of the diaspora groups would easily be furnished with the materials to criticise their involvement in Africa. Thus as much as possible, conferences, workshops and other operational fora should be organised for authenticating 'Africa's position' and *modus operandi*. Through such consultations, the resolution of potentially conflicting positions could be achieved.

In the years ahead, black diaspora organisations may have to seek to establish African branches or chapters of their groups. This would help in a

way to indigenise their operations, which should improve their acceptability to Africans, and lead to real cooperation. With information from their internal co-operators they can easily counter the accusation of being victims of white-dominated Western media. In this regard, with the rise in the number of non-governmental organisations in Africa that are addressing issues such as good governance, human rights and the preservation of the environment, black diaspora organisations could seek to cooperate and work with them.

Diaspora groups should also adopt a more subtle diplomacy in seeking to influence policies in African countries. In this regard, early consultation with African governments could help to minimise the avenues of open conflict between the two groups. Outright public criticism could make erring African countries impervious to suggestions for change. This outcome might not be the case if more subtle means are adopted.

Black diaspora groups such as Trans-Africa, the Congressional Black Congress (CBC) should not solely focus on the conflictual issue of politics. Instead, equal energy has to be expended in influencing their countries to adopt foreign policies favourable to Africa by way of investment and debt forgiveness. The fact is that the inability of the black groups to obtain better aid assistance or a better trade status for Africa in the Western hemisphere, as in the US, tends to create the impression that diasporan groups do not really care about the socioeconomic welfare of Africans. Thus what is required is a careful balancing in terms of their areas of interest. With the injustice in the current world economic order, in which nations of the south are heavily exploited, the black diaspora groups should be seen as devoting some of their energies to promoting a better economic deal in Africa.

Closely tied to the above point is the need to further explore and exploit areas of economic cooperation between diaspora blacks and Africa, especially by way of the former making more direct investments on the continent. In the face of white capital flight from Africa, blacks in the diaspora should seek to provide the necessary capital for investment. With the inauguration of civilian governments in Nigeria since 1999, there has been a deliberate national policy of attracting international investments to the country. As suggested by Johnson (1983), African-Americans and Africans could co-operate for long term economic empowerment. The blacks in the diaspora should therefore be more willing to invest their capital in Africa, while special concessions must be granted to them.

The African Union should be bolder in taking definitive stands on issues that seem to be destructive of the well-being of Africans. In this regard, the millions of blacks in the diaspora should be given the opportunity to articulate and present their views on issues to the continental body. In the absence

of this possibility, the Côte d'Ivoire initiative around the 'African Summit' should be further strengthened so that Africans can meet with diaspora brothers. The OAU's decision not to allow military leaders at its Heads of States meetings was a step in the right direction in the struggle against military dictatorship in Africa. Such definitive steps help to clarify the stance of Africans, with which blacks in the diaspora can identify.

Black diaspora groups, especially the politically visible ones such as Trans-Africa, should be more forthcoming in providing assistance to Africans in distress. They should be seen as participating actively in helping African refugees and victims of natural disaster. Such moves would help to foster the bonds of cooperation between the two groups (see Erhagbe 1994:16-29).

To foster cooperation between the two groups in the years ahead, Africans should be prepared to work more closely with black diasporan organisations by networking with them in pursuit of civil agendas. When eventually necessary, such extant networks could be used to influence political agendas in Africa with the aim of advancing the interest of Africans throughout the continent and the world over.

### **Conclusion**

Anchored in their consciousness of their African ancestry, blacks in the diaspora have over the years maintained positive relations with Africa. In the dark days of European imperialism and colonialism, blacks in the diaspora lent a helping hand to Africa. If they had the right then to be involved in Africa, they must still have that right in the twenty-first century. The African image is still the image of blacks in the diaspora; they therefore still can rightly help work for the maintenance of the good image of the African.

While working for Africa, blacks in the diaspora should avoid an attitude that is paternalistic or presumptuous in any way. They should work to cooperate with Africans, not dictate to them, because in the final analysis, blacks in the diaspora have to respect the independence and national integrity of African states and peoples. Since disagreements breed conflicts, discord and undermine the accomplishment of laudable goals, the option open to the two groups is obviously consultation and cooperation anchored in fraternal Pan-African consciousness, and not a confrontational and offish stance. Just as in the past, the years ahead portend more contributions to Africa's development from blacks in the diaspora, and this can be the case if conscious efforts are made to manage the relationship well.

## Notes

1. Kobina Sekyi, 'The Parting of Ways', cited in Ayodele J. Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa 1900–1945: A Study in Ideology and Social Classes*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973, 168.
2. *Afro-American*, Week of September 28, 1935, 4.
3. For details of the activities of the Councils see Erhagbe, 'African-American Ideas', 239-272.
4. For details of the conference see Erhagbe, 'African-American Ideas', 286-320.
5. *Ebony Magazine*, 28 (July 1973) 41-46.

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