



Make Africa Shine

Narratives of African Diaspora
on Policy-Making Concerning Africa





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Introduction

Africa In Motion, a network of African migrants, requested the Science Shop of Wageningen University and Research Centre to carry out research on the involvement of African Diaspora in European and Dutch policy-making concerning Africa. Foreign policy has a huge impact on daily life in African countries yet African diaspora are rarely consulted on Dutch and European policies that affect Africa. The Science Shop project incorporates various activities and aims to evaluate the current situation by mapping existing organizations, but also by exploring activities and revealing underlying motivations and opportunities. This booklet meets the latter part of this aim by sharing the political experiences and aspirations of eleven African diaspora in the Netherlands. The stories were collected by Elena Johannsen.

In the following pages Nikish Jaël Vita wonders why so few Africans are present at conferences and other meetings. 'When they make a policy about Africa, they have to involve the Africans. If they would take the African diaspora more seriously, their policies would be more effective' she says. Ellie Pierre Kanda Mukuna remembers with frustration how a letter from the heads of all Congolese communities in the Netherlands was not taken into account by parliament because it wasn't forwarded by a 'registered' organization. Carlos Gonçalves stresses the importance of democratic representation and Folly Teko explores the opportunities of self-governance. Rachel Tocklu and Zainab Dauda aim for the economic emancipation of Africa through establishing fair business relations. Others, like Nagwa Ellaboudy would like to be involved, but struggle to find their voice heard.

The intention of this booklet is to share some of the stories of the African diaspora. Although the experiences are quite diverse, what these stories have in common is the passion these people

have for making Africa shine. It is this passion that drives their involvement in policy-making concerning Africa and motivates their commitment to change.

We hope their stories will inspire you.

Wageningen, September 2014

Elena Johannsen, Margriet Goris and Rico Lie



I am ready to fight the good fight

‘This morning I called the Mayor about my daughter. I wanted to meet him to talk about her situation’. My daughter Heba was born with a genetic disorder. She cannot live on her own. Her request for a residence permit has been denied. If we do not win the appeal she will have to go back to Egypt. This summer when I got the news of her rejection I literally became sick and had to spend a week in hospital. My son Karim lives in Egypt, but he cannot take care of her. Heba needs special treatment and her mother’s care. Karim does not have the time or patience for that.

During the Arab spring in 2011, I went back to Egypt to demonstrate. The Arab spring started the 25th of January and I left Holland on the 27th. Every day I was on the Tahrir square and I stayed there until we heard that Mubarak had left. Women were assaulted on the square. That is when I decided I would take my daughter with me to the Netherlands and I applied for asylum for her. Heba is too afraid to speak when someone touches her. She cannot protect herself.

My experience of the repression and abuse of women and children in my own environment made me speak out against it. I also speak out against my own family members. It is my belief that according to the Islam everyone is the same and has the same rights for shelter and food. Children have the right to grow up with sufficient food and with a mother who is not stressed or afraid. At the moment the situation in Egypt is too dangerous for anyone to do anything about this.

As far as I know Egyptians aren’t involved in Dutch foreign policy concerning Egypt. I am interested in politics! I really want to do something for the situation here, but also in Egypt. I have to choose which political party or movement to be involved in. I want to do something, only I do not know how to start. Where should I go? Whom should I contact? Maybe the Red Cross? Let me know, I am ready to fight the good fight!

Nagwa Ellaboudy
Human Rights Activist



We have to be well organized

In 2002 the Dutch Government withdrew Cape Verde from a list of countries eligible for development aid. I went with the Cape Verdean community to the parliamentary groups to express our objection to this decision. Our appeal was considered but unfortunately we could not change it. We found out that this decision was made because of a regulation from the World Bank that states that if countries exceed a certain GDP, they don't qualify for development co-operation. Cape Verde happened to generate a GDP above that level.

My personal mission is to contribute to equality and improved chances for everyone, especially the community in Rotterdam Delfshaven, where I grew up and have lived since the age of three. Being involved in politics, I try to get support for good development projects. I also offer African diaspora my help by advising them, linking them with my network and getting personally involved in projects. Decisions made by politicians are hardly ever communicated to the public; they remain in their own elitist sphere. Also, many African diaspora members are busy with their own personal problems and cannot afford to consider the problems of their home country as well. And if they are involved in the development of their home country, it is often in small-scale projects for the sake of their own communities. Not many people are interested in politics because it takes too much time to find out and understand things. It's very abstract. Many African diaspora organizations have no direct links to the government. They have to seek support from big NGOs and it's not easy to get involved in larger organizations. Compounding this is that many members of African diaspora organizations have a lower educational status and those more highly educated tend to focus on their own careers.

Another crucial challenge is the collaboration between African diaspora and Africans in Africa. Africans are very cautious towards the diaspora, probably because they fear that their position is somehow threatened. The business culture is also very different. When you want to do business with Africans, it takes much more

than a phone call or an email. You have to get involved personally and invest time to get to know your business partner. Otherwise, you will only get a positive response but no actions.

The ministry of foreign affairs is a good platform to start with. The ministry hosts events to consider African diaspora in decision-making concerning African countries. So far, I only see migration and refugee organizations participating in such meetings but there is also room for other organizations. It is very important for African diaspora organizations to show that they are well organized and represent their countries. Another way is to get involved in the bigger advocacy organizations and the different political parties to lobby for your interests.

The power of African diaspora is that they can visualize the consequences of certain Dutch, European policies in their home countries. They know the impact of agreements. Take the fishery as example. A lot of fishermen, amongst them Cape Verdean, suffer from EU policy on fishery. It would be very effective to challenge these policies here in the Netherlands, Europe.

Carlos Gonçalves
Politician Partij van de Arbeid - PvdA Rotterdam



Make Africa shine

In 2012, the heads of several different Congolese Communities in the Netherlands gathered in The Hague at Novotel with the aim of discussing ways and means that could draw the attention of Dutch politicians and decision makers towards the conflict between Congolese regular troops and Rwandan backed rebels in North Kivu, one of eastern D.R. Congo's provinces. The meeting ended up with a letter addressed to the Dutch parliament. This letter was aimed at informing the Dutch parliament on the humanitarian crisis that was taking place in North Kivu and to obtain their support in pressuring the Rwandan government to stop backing the rebels. Unfortunately, no answer from parliament was provided because the community heads weren't recognized as an officially registered organization. At the same time in Belgium, Congolese diaspora organized a demonstration that attracted media attention and resulted in a discussion within the Belgium parliament.

This is the reason I got involved within ADYNE, African Diaspora Youth Network in Europe. With ADYNE we organize training courses and workshops across Europe each year, with the aim of sensitizing African youth to play a major role of mediating and/or bridging the global north - global south relations. I consider African youth to be the key to long-term cooperation because they understand very well both continent's realities.

My mission is to 'make Africa shine'. Africa is a rich continent with great natural diversities and resources. I want to change the way it's been perceived. Africa should be perceived as a continent full of opportunities instead of a continent full of misery. If this perception could be changed, Africans wouldn't come to Europe in search of a better life. Only a few people have already understood this, and have taken the decision to return and invest.

Besides ADYNE I am also running my own project in Congo, supporting raped women and street children. We provide them with seeds and materials for their self-reliance. I started a business with my family in Congo. I was thinking to myself 'What can work in

Congo?’ The answer that came to me was basic needs: food, clothing and so on. We began a clothing warehouse. I buy and they sell. My sister lets me know what she needs. It’s a win-win situation. I have already earned my investment back and we are both making a living from the business. This works because of trust.

A challenge is to unite all Africans from the diaspora around one table. Even within one single African country, people and situations are very different. African diaspora have many different ideas and visions that make them more self-focused. But I believe there is a way to make Africa shine without neglecting personal interests. This is the reason that we aim at expanding our networks through ADYNE in order to reach more dynamic young people.

What motivates our struggle is the positive attitudes and energy African youth demonstrate during meetings. They are really energetic and passionate when it comes to achieving goals. Isn’t it a great gift to be dynamic, strong and focused throughout the challenges?

Elie Pierre Kanda Mukuna
Chairman of African Diaspora Youth Network in Europe - NL



If I am not getting it today, I will get it tomorrow

When Dr. Denis Mukwege, a famous doctor in Congo who helped many raped women in Congo with surgeries and Mary Robinson, a special envoy from the UN, came to the Netherlands for a conference I was not allowed to meet them. I realized that very few Africans are present at conferences and meetings that concern them directly. You miss the African voice in policy-making. If they would consider the African diaspora more seriously, policies would be more effective. They are not only excluding the community here but also the community back in Africa.

My mission is focused on Africa. I really want to contribute to the development of Africa; an Africa with acceptable living standards, where everybody has the chance to develop him or herself and to achieve what he or she wants to achieve in life. I use different ways to work towards my mission. I am working with different organizations, going to debates and other events and also establishing my own organization. I founded PinG (Peace in Goma) in 2012. The conflict in Goma has already been going on for about 20 years and more than 5 million people have died! I cannot understand why until now people and important institutions are not really paying attention. We forget, for example, that mobile phones and many other consumer products really bind us to Congo because 70% of all the minerals forming the raw materials for these products come from Congo. PinG is an online platform providing people with information and sharing ideas and stories about the situation in Congo.

From my experience have I realized, particularly as a student, that money can be an issue. We have a lot of ideas and are able to organize ourselves but we still need some funding and media attention. Getting funding from big institutions is very difficult because they don't know you and smaller organizations often try to pull you on side to work for them. Because we are young, people don't really take us seriously as they assume we don't have experience.

Research is also an issue. There has been a lot of research done about the Congo conflict minerals and other African issues but none by Africans and African organizations themselves.

What always gives me a lot of strength is the amazing positive energy when we as young Africans come together. It is great to gain experience and meet people at events and share our ideas. We really want to do something for society both here and in Africa! We are not limited to institutions or rules or partners. We can work freely together, focusing more on our goals and less to please everybody else, which makes us very flexible and innovative in the development of our own projects. My parents inspire me especially because they always tell me 'If this is not working, that will work' and 'If I am not getting it today, I will get it tomorrow'.

Nikish Jaël Vita
Founder of Peace in Goma - PinG



Africa diaspora unite

When I went to the Conference on the post 2015 development agenda I advocated for the African diaspora to be considered as a global partner in development issues. Our concerns were acknowledged at the conference as the HIRDA recommendations 2015 but these were only taken as recommendations and were not made obligatory. However disappointing, it was nevertheless a first step. HIRDA recently conducted research on female circumcision. All of the interviews were taken by African females and this ensured valuable findings. The women who were interviewed disclosed more information because they trusted the research more.

My mission is to support people in African countries to be self-sufficient and create a situation in which the African continent does not need development aid anymore. In my work I focus on issues of education, gender, livelihood, health and relief. I especially focus on supporting women and children in Africa, particularly East Africa. And furthermore, I work with the African diaspora here in the Netherlands and involve them in my projects. In order to come into contact with the African diaspora we often organize sport activities. Not many African diaspora organizations have membership of international co-operation branch organizations such as Partos. Often African diaspora don't see the advantages of becoming a member of platforms of this kind. I would like to see more African diaspora becoming involved in such organizations so we can advocate together for certain issues.

I am also active in politics. Thanks to my broad network and long-term experience, I am able to attend national and international conferences. This is a good opportunity for me to lobby and to enhance the inclusion of the African diaspora in decision-making concerning African issues. It is not easy to change the political agenda. Neither the governments of host countries or the countries of origin take the knowledge and capacities of the African diaspora seriously. It is difficult to make politicians understand that the African diaspora can play a crucial role in a sustainable relationship between African and European countries. Yet the African diaspora is a

very diverse group. Therefore it is challenging to bring the different African diaspora groups together, working towards a common goal to have a stronger voice.

It would be a great benefit to the African-European relationship to consider the African diaspora in development issues. We are the bridge between those two continents. We know both worlds, have a broad network, know the local context, and Africans have more trust in the African diaspora.

Fatumo Farah
Director of Himilo Relief and Development Association
(HIRDA)



Photo: HIRDA

Africans are no beggars

During one of my trips to Ghana I met a poultry farmer. While he was showing me around I noticed how critical the situation was there. Most of the poultry farmers were bankrupt and different poultry farmers were telling me the same story. This is the result of the imports of frozen chicken, the dumping of chicken pads by companies enabled by international agreements such as, for example, the Economic Partnership Agreement. I really wanted to do something about it, so we started writing a project proposal on how we could use poultry to create a small-scale business for women in rural areas. We got support from Oxfam Novib and the European Union, which helped us to start with the Sankofa Family Poultry project. At the moment we support about 1000 women creating their own poultry businesses and we are not only active in Ghana. We have also started a campaign in the Netherlands to educate people here about the impact of their eating habits. We have even encouraged a popular Dutch cook to give a workshop on how to use all parts of the chicken.

The basic idea behind Sankofa is bridging the Netherlands with Ghana to create a better understanding between these two countries. It is very important for the integration of Ghanaian immigrants here, but also for the Dutch people, to learn that their behavior actually has a huge influence on the development in Africa. I like to do things where you can see the impact. And my greatest wish is that Africa will be in the situation to finally say 'We don't need development aid'.

One of the biggest challenges I see is that projects from the African diaspora always depend on funding from Dutch or European institutions. This funding is often of a low level and limited to a short time-frame, which makes it difficult to plan long-term activities that might have a greater impact. Also, I recognized that many Africans here lack professional skills to get into contact with influential organizations or the government. Compounding this is a tendency for many Africans to think too small, which restrains them from working together towards a higher aim. Most of the

projects they do are for their own communities and often have little impact outside of that. But these are not the kind of projects that will help Africa. Africans are no beggars, the only thing they want is employment. What Africa needs is employment, Africans want to work.

Despite these challenges, I am seeing so many opportunities in Ghana now. In Ghana I can develop myself to be more productive. Here in Europe life is getting harder, salaries are going down while the prices are going up. In Africa, if you prepare yourself well, you can make a good business.

Kwame Duncan
Founder of Sankofa Foundation



You cannot shave a man's head in his absence

Some farmers in Africa are able to lobby now, something they couldn't do before. In West-Africa farmers were invited to the Joint Technical Committee on Agriculture. People have begun to recognize that good agricultural policies are not implemented because farmers have not been involved in the processes.

My mission is to improve living conditions in Africa without compromising the future. We have to take responsibility and take care of our great resources for the sake of our children.

In my work I try to empower African farmers by finding ways of how to involve them in policy-making processes. The majority of the people in Africa are involved in agriculture. If you don't involve farmers in policy-making processes the policies won't be successful. In Nigeria, there is a popular proverb: 'You cannot shave a man's head in his absence'. I locate key farmer organizations that can represent the interests of local farmers groups. My focus is on determining the issues the farmers face.

One of the biggest challenges in my work is that there are some groups that get all the media attention. When you look closer you see a lot of words and no facts. On the other hand, there are some groups that are aware of the situation in the field and accomplish great things but are not considered in policy-making. They have the bullet but they don't have the gun. And those who have the gun don't have the bullets. So, I try to bring these groups together.

Another issue is how to ensure that policies actually work? Policies become nothing if they are not implemented. The challenge is that people often fight against policies without understanding it properly. You have to really understand the policies and the history behind them in order to have good arguments.

Finally, I believe we have to be critical towards ourselves. We can blame others for our problems but what is our own contribution to the issues?

There are a lot of opportunities in Africa and we have so many resources. So, we should take our responsibility to use it well.

Olu Ajayi
Senior Programme Coordinator
Agricultural & Rural Development Policy
Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation - CTA



The system is not made for us

I am very intrigued by the topic of individual sovereignty and citizenship. The concept of nation states is a moral construction that does not fit in Africa, because it is very different from the social structures of African societies, communities and kingdoms. We are giving too much power to the state by accepting a system that has not even been created by ourselves, which has been imposed on us. I believe many people forget how much power each individual has. If one individual sees a problem and starts questioning the existing structures, he or she will find like-minded people, who will empower him/her to create something new. I believe everyone has unalienable rights that he or she was born with.

Life is independent although we behave now as if life was owned by society. I didn't choose to be from Togo. I therefore don't need to be 'Togolese' property for the rest of my life, well after this political identity had been coupled to my person and at a time that I was inapt to choose it for myself. An economic dimension of human identity should be enough. Whether one is from Ethiopia or China, functioning as economic persona remains crucial to selling and buying. Pushing individuals to ethnical backgrounds is not the objective of individual sovereignty. I have a stateless passport. Officially, I'm an alien. I nevertheless believe I should only have to ask for a visa to travel and do whatever I choose to do, in the way that any modern human can.

My aim is to make people aware of the fact that there is more than the conventional way of thinking and doing things. By seeing this, people can make decisions based on a broader perspective. I tell them to be aware of their own choices, to discuss things a lot with people via Facebook, through blog writing and lectures, attending debates or by simply talking to people. I have also written a book on individual sovereignty in French but I am planning to translate it into Dutch and English as well. What I find very important to do with people is to investigate artistic expression. It's not only a fun thing to do; when more people are involved it enables individuals to deal with their own traumas.

I do paintings, create totems with people, make movies, photography and music. Not long ago I was invited to give a lecture to drama students in Leeuwarden who aim to carry out drama-therapy in Africa. This sort of therapy can only be effective if the students know the people they are working with. I explained, for example, in how far many folks in Africa deal with the topic of religion in a way more nuanced manner than it's done here. I explained how totems have significant meanings to Africans from a traditional perspective. Once totems are used, they are not just objects anymore; they turn into spiritual tools. This is an important aspect for students to consider. I emphasized my example with an analogy. To illustrate my point I reflected with students on how they talked about their mobile phones, and about their relationship with cars. They then understood how we end up putting life into 'things' and that this could also be seen as a form of divinization.

To return to my topic of individual sovereignty; I don't believe that the existing official governments are effective tools to tackle African issues from the source. That's why I am focusing on dealing with individuals who are open to my ideas and who can also inspire me to develop new ideas.

Folly Teko
Artist



The agenda has already been set

In 2012 Oxfam organized a competition for African entrepreneurs in Europe, sponsored by the European Union. The program was about presenting ideas. I won first prize for the best idea in the Netherlands, but no funds for investment were offered. So, I can't help wondering how I am supposed to start anything based on my ideas.

Nevertheless, I want to show other Africans that this is possible. Everything is possible. When you have a vision, go for it. It won't be easy but you can achieve it.

As a freelance consultant, I try to support other people who want to start their business in rural development. I have set up my own foundation, called AgriDynamic, to stimulate sustainable agriculture by developing training programs for farmers. I am currently managing training centers which I have recently set up in Cameroon, Kenya and Zambia, where low educated people are getting the chance to develop basic skills in poultry farming. At the same time people who practice at the farm get the chance to sell their products so that they can sustain themselves, while using funds generated from their businesses to pay the teachers! Furthermore, I also attend political discussions and conferences on African issues.

One of the greatest challenges is that we don't have access to resources. When we have good ideas, there is not enough funding. We have to contact Dutch organizations, such as Oxfam, to get some support because we don't have a direct relationship with the government. The main problem is that Oxfam and other co-financing organizations are often disconnected from the reality. You have to fit into their programs, while the reality on the ground in Africa might be asking for something else entirely. Most of us have to do our work voluntarily but we also need to sustain ourselves. Another frustrating issue is that when the government is aiming to consult with us on certain issues, the agenda has already been set before they consult us. I remember attending a consultation meeting organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The only thing they did was

present their ideas and plans, which they had already agreed upon. There was no room in the meeting for me to express my opinions. So, I was wondering, why are you inviting me?

Despite these problems, the African Diaspora remains very resilient. Even though we don't get the support we need, we do our best to do what we can do. We are well educated and we have a good network at home. Just with our own networks and understanding of the issues we are able to achieve great things.

Gaston Ngochembo
Founder of AgriDynamic and Freelance Consultant



Is Europe missing a chance?

I remember very well when we linked an Ethiopian entrepreneur from the flower sector to Dutch companies. It turned out very well. Now he is one of the most important producers of flowers and vegetables. His company has more than 6000 employees. Recently it has been sold for 200 million dollars.

One of the key factors of Teampro's success is arranging trade missions. I always ensure that an African minister accompanies African entrepreneurs, so that the equivalent Dutch minister has to be present. This creates the beginnings of an enabling environment. We have arranged more than 30 trade missions. I believe in win-win situations and in doing business at an equal level. When African countries are economically better off, there will be fewer conflicts.

In my work I link Dutch companies up with African entrepreneurs and the other way round. I focus intentionally on business relationships instead of development aid programs because as business partners you are equals. In development aid projects you always have a receiver and a giver, which creates an unequal relationship from the very beginning. I provide businesses with several services such as trainings, conducting market research and enabling financial support. I travel a lot to sustain and broaden my network and to keep updated about current situations. On a recent trip to Ethiopia, for example, I discovered that there was only one large fish supplier in the country. This surprised me because people in Ethiopia eat a lot of fish as they are fasting for much of the year. Teampro then made a call for fish suppliers and there was a run for it.

Over the years I have developed a large network of different companies and entrepreneurs. Sometimes the Dutch government helps facilitate. We work for instance together in trade missions. In (post) conflict situations where it is more difficult to attract Dutch companies financial incentive is welcome, and at the same time it is essential to create employment, as this can be part of the solution. One of the greatest challenges I have experienced in my work is

when companies have great ideas but don't have the knowledge and capital. Some companies are also not professional enough to deal with European or West-African countries.

African diaspora are the right partners to mediate as they are familiar with both contexts and have the relevant knowledge and financial resources. Diaspora for example from Rwanda and Ghana are proactive and they can offer many opportunities. You just have to open your eyes. Africa has a lot of resources and the young generation is becoming more educated. Europe is not as important as it used to be as a trading partner, the market is much larger. Africans are not really waiting to trade with Europe. There is the booming Asian market as well as many trading opportunities amongst African countries themselves. Maybe Europe is missing a chance?

Rachel Tocklu
Founder Teampro



Divided we fall, united we stand

I have decided to start my own company, Business and Investment Africa, because I want to be independent. I believe as an African diaspora I have a better understanding of African issues. It is important for me to be able to make my own decisions so that I can do my best for Africa. I am very passionate about the development of Africa. My mission is to challenge the common way of thinking in relation to Africa. I want to show that Africa is a rich continent and contribute to a fairer relationship between Africa and Europe.

In my work I am linking Dutch businesses with African entrepreneurs. It starts with finding the right partners. Africans have raw materials but lack finance to produce. Before Dutch companies will consider investing time and money a relationship has to grow. Communication is crucial to this. In the long term I aim at shareholder agreements to ensure fair relationships.

My work is very challenging, especially since I founded my company only a few months ago. I have to arrange many things, such as financing and publicity, all by myself. It is important to me that business projects are sustainable in the long-run, yet many businesses are looking for short-term profits. They don't want to invest in preparation. Furthermore, I have also experienced that Africans often don't trust the African diaspora, which makes relationship building even more challenging. People in Africa expect a lot from the African diaspora. When African diaspora don't do what they promise to do it reflects badly on them. We often lack the courage to say 'no' or to tell prospective partners in Africa that there are no guarantees. I always say 'I will try to do it but I can't promise I will succeed'. I generally start with family and friends and their family and friends. They trust me and know that I do what I say.

There are funding opportunities for matchmaking between Dutch and African entrepreneurs via the Netherlands Enterprise Agency, ROV.nl, but these arrangements are not very accessible. In my experience, many African diaspora generally lack the education needed to write these proposals but are, in practice, often better able to

perform the tasks required than those who write good proposals. As well as this, Dutch senior experts or PUM have assumed control of much of the matchmaking, probably to reduce costs. However, the PUM have no African diaspora among them, while the African diaspora have the unique quality of knowing both the African and the Dutch context from an African perspective. I believe that, for the sustainable development of both Africa and Europe, we all have to work together; Africans, African diaspora and Europeans: 'Divided we fall, united we stand'.

Another issue is that whether African or Dutch, you will be confronted with challenging European policies such as import and export taxes on agricultural products. In recent discussions with my partners about policies it became evident how much of an obstruction they can be.

I love my work and will go through the difficulties and always try to do my best. I have learned that if I negotiate well, companies are willing to invest in sustainable business projects on a long-term basis.

Zeinab Dauda
Founder Business and Investment Africa - BIA





