

Virtual Diasporas

and global problem solving project papers

‘DIASPORA’ CAPITALISM AND ‘EXILE’ AS A WAY OF LIFE: Some observations on the political and economic mobilization of dispersed peoples

By G. Pascal Zachary

I am sitting in a San Francisco restaurant with MC, a Filipino historian from Manila. MC moved here recently at the behest of community leaders who fear Filipinos are forgetting their roots. MC teaches class at a community center in “Little Manila,” in San Francisco’s “South of Market” neighborhood. MC is erudite and eloquent on how Filipinos can manage to balance awareness of their homeland with the seductions of integration into American society and the imperative to do so. As we converse, he glances down repeatedly at a mobile phone in his lap. We are talking, eating our meal and then suddenly he breaks off and says he must go. Why, I ask? He hands me the silent phone and I read the message on the screen: Go to the bank.

“It’s from my wife,” he says. “She’s been text-messaging me for the past hour. She needs money.” Not surprising. What is surprising? His wife is in Manila. MC must go to a bank and wire her money.

Across the Bay in Oakland, a month earlier, I am listening to Osita Osadebe sing in his Ibo language at a private party for what the Ibo call a “social club.” Osadebe is perhaps Nigeria’s greatest bandleader. He has been turning out hits since the 1950s. Sort of the Count Basie of high-life. He makes deeply swinging music that is always in style and writes lyrics about the most profound experiences of his tribal group, the Ibo. These are the people who launched Africa’s first post-independence civil war. Biafra. A very bloody war, the first rock-star war (Made famous by George Harrison holding a benefit concert for, yes, the starving Biafran children). The Ibo lost, but rock stars gained a lasting beacon: find the light of disintegrating African country and acclaim will follow. The Ibo were left scattered around the world. Nigeria is going to pieces and once more and the Ibo see an opening. There is a crypto-independence movement among the Ibo now. And Osadebe, while not explicitly political, is the troubadour of the Ibo. There are

20 million and they one of the great African peoples. Achebe, author of the classic "Things fall Apart," is Ibo and writes about his tribe in a recent book of essays, Home and Exile, based on lectures at Harvard.

The Ibo also have perhaps the most fully formed diaspora among African peoples, because their consciousness of exile was forged during the years after Biafra collapsed. There are tens of thousands of Ibos in the U.S., with Houston, Los Angeles and the Bay Area having large communities. Osadebe often tours these exile communities and his latest album was recorded live at various "social clubs." There are dozens scattered across the U.S. Essentially they are meeting places. An Ibo group in Houston, say, rents a hall for Osadebe to perform in and then only Ibo show up because his performance is completely unpublicized. The Ibo are happy to hold a private show for themselves, even though they know they could draw in additional paying customers by advertising.

Osadebe is eight thousand miles from home, but within a few minutes from the club there is a Catholic Church with an Ibo priest. The priest is one of the prime movers in the community. Another is the man sitting across from me, a California state bank examiner who in his spare time has organized an international Ibo social club in which members from scores of countries are connected by email. He talks of the need to preserve Ibo traditions among "my people" scattered around the world.

Another restaurant, this one in Accra, the capital of Ghana. I am talking with PS, a physical-education teacher and schoolboy soccer coach from Seattle who spends each summer here. He owns two sporting goods stores. His stores sell the flashiest, slickest sports equipment and apparel in the city. Only the well-off can afford PS's merchandize and his stores lose money. Each year PS covers his losses, by bringing to Ghana thousands of dollars from his school district paycheck. The money, which wouldn't buy him much in the U.S., goes a long way in Ghana. His stores employ the children of some of his favorite relatives. He sponsors the uniforms of Accra's soccer team. He has a sports radio show. In short, PS is a big man in Accra. Is his business a business, or is it another kind of social club?

Another Ghana story: OP is the traditional chief of one of Ghana's most important tribal, or ethnic, groups. Traditional chiefs were largely stripped of their power after independence in 1957 by Ghana's first president, Nkrumah. Along with many other independence leaders in Africa, he saw "tribalism" as a threat to nation-building and an inefficiency that no modern economy could afford. Nkrumah broke the traditional chiefs, installing in a centralized state in their place. But after his coup, the state broke down. Today, the state provides few services, leaving many local needs unmet. Traditional chiefs, seizing an opportunity, are reviving their institution by seeking to provide local services. Since his ascension two years, OP has been in the forefront of this movement. He was elected from a group of men with chiefly qualifications, on the strength of his own experience in local government in New Jersey, where he lived during the years of Ghana's military rule.

And finally, Christmas Day in Ghana: I am listening to Ghana's most popular singer,

Koji Antwi. Each year for the past 10 he has given a Christmas Eve performance at the National Theater. The gig lasts for hours, into the morning, and this Christmas Day, before the last encore, a special guest, climbs down with his wife from the VIP boxes. President J.A. Kufuor. Elected 11 months earlier, he is not known as a fervent high-life fan. He explains that he owes Antwi a debt: During his campaign for the Presidency, when the dictator's chosen successor, appeared likely to win the election through superior finances, Antwi organized a series of benefit concerts for him. Antwi's support for Kufuor seems banal until considering that he lives year-round in Switzerland, where he records his albums. While married to a Swiss woman, Antwi is unknown in Europe, his reputation resting solidly on his popularity in Ghana. His career represents a new phase in diasporic culture. Once the diaspora happily consumed the culture of the homeland. Now the diaspora produces "authentic" culture that is consumed by the homeland and that defines the homelands aspirations: to live as an exile with a diasporic consciousness.

These diaspora moments are snapshots that suggest the complexity of describing the mobility of human communities. Life-reports and stories are important because official statistics and survey data tell only part of the story. Demographers estimate that no more than 200 million people live outside their countries of birth. This number represents less than four percent of the world's population. Demographers ask why pay attention to such a small group of people? The answer isn't merely that the number is understated (though it must be since, after all, nearly 30 million foreign-born people live in the U.S. and the wars of the past decade have forced millions more people to leave their home countries). People in exile have a greater effect than their numbers indicate. Communities of dispersed people from the Jews of the 1940s to the Kosovars of 2000 have influenced political events in ways belied by their size. A relatively small number of ethnic Tamils, hailing from south India and Sri Lanka but living in Western Europe, provided substantial funding to the armed insurrection against the government of Sri Lanka by Tamils living in the country. People of Estonian and Latvian descent in the U.S. played a pivotal role in these former Soviet republics following their independence in 1991 and have helped the two Baltic nations become part of the first group of ex-Eastern Bloc nations that are expected to be admitted into the European Union over the next few years. And of course Israelis in the U.S. (often holding joint citizenship) and people of Irish descent have influenced in myriad ways the evolution of Israel and the Irish republic, providing funds for development and international political support.

In general, the political influence of dispersed communities has been the subject of much study. In this paper I want to argue that dispersed communities have the potential to influence economics and wealth-creation to a much greater degree than generally considered likely. These diasporas also have the capability to promote, in the case of developing countries, de-centralized, knowledge-based, indigenous alternatives to the economic structures produced by the nexus of finance capitalism, multinational corporations and multilateral global institutions such as the World Bank. Specifically, I have two goals in this paper. First, I want to sketch out a large opportunity that is usually ignored by poor countries; this is how to take advantage of the talents, money and energies of people from their country who have moved elsewhere, often to rich countries. Second, I want to suggest some ways that politicians in wealthy countries can address the

fears of their electorates that the persistence of a diasporic consciousness, among some portion of their society, will destabilize international relations or pose a threat to the multicultural/national-identity reformation projects that most rich countries have embarked upon. In part I will attempt to answer these questions by examining a particular dispersed community, of Ghanaian nationals living outside their country of origin. My study of “overseas” Ghanaians provides a foundation, I hope, for a larger theoretical and research effort.

Taken together, these two factors could positively change the dynamics of the political economy of development by:

(a) creating a new mode of foreign assistance and investment: economic stimulus through self-organizing diasporas networks spawned by civil society and the private sector but legitimized and sustained by government and multilateral institutions.

(b) altering the terms of trade in human talent, by encouraging “brain circulation” in addition to brain drain.

(c) strengthening support in rich countries for continued and deepened ties between ethnic communities in these countries and their countries of origin as a matter, not only of human rights, but of economic and political significance.

(d) creating a recognition within poor countries that overseas communities deserve political, economic and social means to maintain their links with their home country including support by their home society and government for ongoing, albeit episodic involvement of nationals who chiefly reside outside of the country.

(e) helping diasporas to play a more effective role in leveling the growing imbalance of power between wealthy and poor nations.

Political and social policies aimed at harnessing or managing diaspora communities are in their infancy. There are no multilateral agencies or international treaties concerned with the peaceful, voluntary movement of people across borders, and the subsequent transnational associations arising from these movements. Neither the United States nor the European Union has no set of rules governing policies towards diaspora communities, rather instead viewing these communities, if it sees them at all, as atomized immigrants or, at most, as part of a national exodus (so the Igbo becomes a Nigerian, the Aceh an Indonesian). But as the power of the nation-state weakens, and as the power of diaspora communities grows, the logic of incorporating these communities into theories and practices of international relations and civil society grows as well.

The ability of an Igbo in California to plan, cooperate and act in concert with an Igbo in Germany is insured only by the national laws of the respective countries. This may be sufficient. But the time may come when an international agency, such as a World Mobility Organization, may try to challenge those individual governments who purposely exclude people who live abroad from the political, social and economic processes of their

origin nation. At the same time, efforts at integration of immigrants in wealthy countries could become constrained, not only by the demands and preferences not only of immigrants in the midst of a country (say the Igbo in California) but that international law may give standing to Igbo in Nigeria (or, even Germany) when it comes to contest the preservation and amplification of Ibo customs in the U.S. The world, then, could move towards a new kind of legitimacy for diasporas based not, as in the past, on winning political independence or autonomy for an imagined homeland, but as a reward for the economic and civic benefits that flow from a mobilized diaspora.

Not everyone favors the political and economic mobilization of dispersed nationals. Diasporas still worry many national elites. Until recently, Mexico maintained many barriers to the fuller participation of its nationals living abroad, and leaders in many poor countries remain baffled by the extent of their brain drain from their own countries and what they can do about it. Nevertheless, a growing number of countries seek to benefit from their diaspora communities and show signs of being able to do so. In this paper, I want describe some of the efforts by these countries; outline policy options; and identify research priorities. Much empirical work remains to be done on dispersed communities and the public policies designed either to promote or punish their activities. We need to know more about the economic relations between homeland and overseas members of a community and the extent to which new information and communication technologies (ICT) enhance connections between exile and homeland communities. We also need to understand better the tools available to governments who wish to build closer ties with their diaspora communities.

Strategies for harnessing forces of the global diaspora should be at the center of efforts by poor countries to jump-start development, and not on their margins, as they are now. Part of the attraction of the role of dispersed communities in economic development, to be sure, stems from the failure of bi-lateral and multi-lateral assistance and direct investments from multinational corporations to stimulate balanced growth. Neo-liberalism notched successes after the fall of the Iron Curtain, but in many poor countries liberalization led to impoverishment of the middle and lower classes and the global dispersal of the elite. Foreign aid, as is well documented, has had perverse effects. Multinational investment is concentrated in relatively few countries. The poorest countries, especially those in Africa, receive virtually zero investment when dollars from resource exploitation are backed out. Government austerity programs, forced on poor governments by the burden of their debt load or the philosophy of neo-liberalism itself, undermined human capital, weakening already weak educational and health systems. Demographic change in rich countries, which resulted in smaller workforce growth (or contraction), created incentives for employers in these countries to hire the best and brightest of poor countries, paying a premium for their services even over their own citizens.

Thus, poor countries were squeezed from two sides in the 1990s: (1) a combination of more open trade, privatization of government services (and the imposition of “user fees”) and a greater emphasis on free-market, private-sector forces brought some advantages to poor countries, especially to elites, but also increased insecurity of ordinary people (2) at

the same time, a growing slice of the most successful people in poor countries left for better opportunities in rich ones. The result of these two forces was that in many poor countries there were few or almost no winners from the economic approach known as “neo-liberalism.” The biggest winners often left their home countries for jobs and permanent residence in rich nations, while those winners who remained grew less connected to their societies as new services (schools, hospitals and the like) and forms of employment and enterprise sprung up that were open only to a small segment of a society, the best educated and wealthiest.

Despite the current war on terror and the traumas to world trade of the sluggish growth or contraction in many rich countries, the development situation is essentially unchanged in 2002. Poor countries have sought to mitigate the drain of talent by encouraging remittances from workers abroad; easing restrictions on dual citizenship; and loudly urging successful people in the diaspora to return home. Among elites in developing nations, the drain of talent is a mixed blessing: Europe and the U.S. represent oceans of opportunity for their people, and a single overseas success can support an entire family back home. Any crude measures to limit educational or job opportunities abroad is deeply unpopular. I can recall one morning when I listened to Abdoulaye Wade, President of Senegal, declare that overseas Senegalese were crucial to his country’s revival. He then appealed to his fellow citizens to return home, blithely ignoring that seated next me was Wade’s daughter. One of his two children, she lives in Paris. Her brother lives in London.

Wade made no mention of the contradiction and his daughter, at least, told me she wasn’t coming home, not even for Daddy.

Poor countries, to be sure, have taken steps to at least attempt to minimize the adverse effects of an outflow of talented people. India has used a variety of “soft incentives” to encourage its citizens to return home, appealing to the patriotism and benevolence of diaspora communities in the U.S. Many countries have tried to “bond” their college graduates, demanding that they repay the costs of their education if they leave for jobs in other countries. These programs, however, are difficult to enforce and, besides, those who leave find they can usually easily pay off their debt to their home government once they land a high-wage job abroad. Taiwan and Korea, relatively wealthy countries that are barely a generation removed from developing-world status, have offered financial benefits to those technically-trained people who return. Truly poor countries, of course, lack the means of essentially paying returnees a bonus for their decision and instead must rely on moral exhortations, pleading with talented people to stay home. Such appeals bring weak results. More effective are diplomatic initiatives. When Britain’s National Health Service hired planeloads of nurses from Jamaica and South Africa a few years ago, the governments of both countries protested to the British government, which in turn persuaded the NHS to end hiring from these countries. Poor countries also have asked international professional organizations to oppose the expansion of visa programs that allow wealthy countries to import skilled workers. At a meeting of the international association of nurses last summer, for instance, nursing leaders from several European countries agreed to try to persuade their home governments to restrict the importation of nurses from poor countries.

Poor nations show signs of doing more than trying to stem the outflow of native talent and to encourage the return of citizens working overseas. The leaders of poor nations increasingly recognize that the forces propelling their citizens to look for better opportunities elsewhere are not likely to abate and that the ultimate tactic against “brain drain” is to create an attractive environment at home. This will take some doing. In the meantime, poor nations are beginning to realize that they must improve links with their national and ethnic diasporas. They have come to this conclusion on their own, in a common-sense way, but also from viewing the policies of certain wealthy nations that once exported large numbers of people or still do. Rich countries, meanwhile, have actively recruited highly-skilled workers from poor countries. Britain organized raids on nurses and doctors from Africa and the Caribbean. Ireland has wooed Indian software programmers. The U.S. doubled its H-1b program. At the same time, rich countries sought to ease anxieties of highly-skilled immigrants, revising domestic laws on permanent residency and attacking (often for the first time) social exclusion and racial discrimination. These efforts are complicated by 9-11 and the quickening xenophobia in such countries as the U.S., which went through a long period of relatively relaxed acceptance of immigrants. The crackdown against immigrant groups that support foreign governments, while limited to a few “outlaw” states, could spread to other diaspora communities.

In the race to attract global talent, countries play the diaspora card when they can. Faced with skills and labor shortages in the 1990s, the government of Ireland turned to recruiting from the hundreds of thousands of Irish nationals who left the country in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, setting up job fairs in certain cities in Britain, the U.S. and Australia that are known for their Irish enclaves. So many Irish have returned to Ireland in recent years that networks have formed to help them adjust. The government of Singapore keeps a registry of all its overseas nationals, listing skills and educational backgrounds. When a multinational considers making an investment in Singapore, the government may provide a list of skilled people abroad available for recruitment.

Multinational corporations also are aware of how the origins of an employee may assist in expanding business. For instance, corporations routinely send into China, India and other parts of Asia employees born from the region in the hope of forging a stronger tie between people of similar outlooks.

It is harder for poor countries to woo back their own talent if only because their living conditions are less attractive than those in rich countries. Poor countries are trying to overcome this. Consider the experience of Ghana. The new government of J.A. Kufuor, in power after two decades in opposition, has made wooing the diaspora a major priority, becoming the first sub-Saharan country to seize this possible development tool. Last summer, the country staged what it called a “Homecoming Summit” for the roughly one million Ghanaians who live outside the country (note: some estimates put the number of overseas Ghanaians as high as 3 million, but if this figure is accurate at all it incorporates Ghanaians living in African countries of Nigeria, Togo and South Africa).

A few thousand people returned to Accra for the meeting, which was attended by the entire Cabinet and the President, J.A. Kufuor. The returnees asked for the enactment of dual citizenship and better treatment of those who return and the government asked for overseas Ghanaians to invest in their country.

But in a reminder of the difficulties in attracting the diaspora, hundreds of people on their way to the conference arrived late when Ghana's national airline cancelled flights without warning. Returning Ghanaians are often startled by what they face at home, having been spoiled by the ease of service in Europe and the U.S. A popular comedian in Accra has a solo act, "the Saga of the Returning Ghanaian," in which he parodies the experiences of returnees and the attitudes of natives towards them. The frustrations are many. DA, an immigration lawyer from Los Angeles, serves as an adviser (without pay) to Kufuor. He and his wife, both born, raised and educated in Ghana, were staunch critics of Rawlings, during his 20-year rule, and both eagerly returned when Kufuor took power early last year. In anticipation of an influx of the diaspora onto his staff, Kufuor had pushed through a change in the country's law, exempting his volunteers from paying a duty on imported personal goods. But because of political sensitivity surrounding Kufuor's reliance on the diaspora for his pool of advisers, DA worries about unwanted press reports if he actually doesn't pay the duty. Yet at the same time he bristles that he can't afford the duty, which will run into thousands of dollars.

Despite frustrations, Ghanaians do quickly enter the flow of the country, helped by the ability that the Internet gives them to read local newspapers and listen to local radio. A few are making a difference in Ghana, though usually by keeping one foot in their adopted country and one foot in their homeland. Look at the roots-and-wings experience of KA, a leading Ghanaian businessman who splits his time between Accra and Los Angeles. KA attended university in California in the 1970s and remained in the U.S. following a succession of military coups that resulted in the dictatorship of Jerry Rawlings. When in 1992, Rawlings suddenly decided to call an election, and stand for the presidency, KA responded by declaring his candidacy. KA campaigned throughout the country, because election law required that he have an organization in each province. Drawing pressure from Rawlings, KA ultimately abandoned his candidacy when he realized that, as a U.S. citizen, he was barred from running.

Rawlings won the election, and after a decent interval KA returned, this time with a business proposition: Western Union. In the early 1990s, Western Union, the largest broker in cash remittances, didn't even bother to offer services to West African and East African countries. KA persuaded the company's chief executive to let him set up operations in Ghana and other sub-Saharan countries, arranging with local banks to act as transfer agents. The effort succeeded. Western Union has scores of offices in Ghana today, and hundreds across Africa. Last year, the company shipped \$150 million into Ghana and more than \$500 million into Nigeria.

KA's role was critical in making this happen, Western Union says, which highlights the way in which a motivated diaspora member can overcome hurdles that would stymie a person less passionate about a place.

An association called the Ghana Cyber Group wants to do the same, only on a larger scale. Held together by e-mail and a Web site, GCG is a cyber-investment club, open to the Ghanaian diaspora, whose goal is to direct investment into Ghana, drawing on overseas Ghanaian money. The group, which is closely tied to the current government, seeks to replicate what members of the Lebanese diaspora have done for years in West Africa and Ghana, in particular: raise “family” money to fund high-profit businesses.

People of Lebanese descent play a large role in the Ghanaian economy, dominating the formal retail trade, manufacturing and import-export. Lebanese business involvement in Ghana stretches back a century, and many Lebanese consider themselves proud Ghanaians. Using global networks, Lebanese in Ghana raise money for grocery stores, light manufacturing and other businesses that can reap high profits in Africa for those who know the terrain and the risks.

Curiously, Ghana’s new government while passionate about the need to draw black Ghanaians from the diaspora into the mix of economic policy and practice has ignored the potential leverage to be gained from reaching out to the Lebanese community. No Lebanese serves as an adviser to the President and, despite the evident relevance of the Lebanese model to the Ghanaian situation, no civil society figure has ever raised in public the possibility of drawing on Lebanese expertise in a systematic way.

Yet the capitalist energies of diaspora communities are essential to a country such as Ghana, which is largely bypassed by multinational corporations. Paradoxically, leaders of global corporations cite the lack of diaspora investment as a reason to avoid the country. One American executive, whose company has invested in Ghana, says: “If Ghanaians living outside the country don’t have confidence to invest in their own country, why should we?”

Investment is a sticky issue, of course. Non-economic reasons often dominate when an overseas national puts cash into his home country. His mother may need regular support, in the form of cash payments, or he may want to purchase a house to use in his retirement. Productive investment from the diaspora, notwithstanding KA’s example, remains relatively rare. For years, Ghana’s government seemed to prefer the investment dollars of strangers on the assumption that their own people living abroad couldn’t possibly have enough funds or know enough to contribute. Ghana still offers no preferences to overseas nationals trying to invest at home.

For Ghana to succeed in wooing its one million nationals around the world, the government may need to take more dramatic steps than simply rolling out the welcome mat. While a “welcome back” message is preferable to presumptions of returnee disloyalty (or even subversion), the government of Ghana still lacks a conceptual and legal framework in which to integrate the energies of its diaspora into a program of renewal. The “Homecoming Summit,” while notable, has led nowhere, partly because of weak follow-up and partly because Ghana’s government lacks plans to convert its enthusiastic diaspora into an energetic contributor. Rather curiously, neither the World

Bank, nor the IMF, nor any of the dozens of international assistance agencies in Ghana has ever seen fit to attempt to harness diaspora talents.

The failure of foreign donors to perceive the value in a mobilized Ghanaian diaspora is part of a larger failure on the part of development thinkers to examine ways in which the cultural “glue” that holds together transnational communities can also serve to promote economic activity. Part of the reason for this oversight may stem from the common presumption that diasporas are parasitic in their economic behavior. Consider the role of the Lebanese (or people of Lebanese descent) in Ghana. Invited into West Africa by the British about 100 years ago, the Lebanese gained control of major parts of the import-export, retail and manufacturing sectors. De-colonization proved a setback for Lebanese aspirations, as newly independent African states forced out the Lebanese. Within a decade, some returned at the behest of Africans and then others came because of Lebanon’s bloody civil war. By the late 1990s, most of the leading businessmen in Ghana were of Lebanese extraction. Of the Lebanese elite, most held Ghanaian passports and some married Ghanaian spouses.

The parallels with Ghana’s own diaspora proved elusive, however. Where overseas Ghanaians rarely invested in productive activities in their home country (choosing instead to send remittances that were immediately consumed), the Lebanese-Ghanaians not only re-invested profits in Ghana but encouraged Lebanese from around the world to do the same. By 2001, the Lebanese community in Accra had swollen into the low thousands, bulked up by Lebanese fleeing Sierra Leone, the Congo, Liberia and other war-torn countries. The community was now large enough to support a Beirut-Accra flight.

Yet despite the revival of the Lebanese community, and the absence of overt resistance to Lebanese business success, Ghana’s black policymakers and business elite failed to recognize the lessons for their own diaspora and for their inspired effort to mobilize the one million overseas Ghanaians on behalf of Ghana. In all the public discussions over tapping its diaspora, Kufuor’s government has never included a single Lebanese. Neither has the World Bank, which supports a major development program in Ghana, ever looked at the role of the Lebanese in the Ghanaian economy. It is as if the very importance of Lebanese diaspora to Ghana’s economy stands as a rebuke to the country. And yet, if Ghana’s own black diaspora is to be mobilized, policies and practices must be adopted that, to some extent, replicate the Lebanese experience in Ghana.

Ghanaians living abroad are intrigued by the possibility of acting collectively to promote business in Ghana. One overseas group, the Ghana Cyber Club, is trying to launch a fund (from money pooled by its members) that would invest in businesses in Ghana.

Poor countries have an excuse for their sorry performance in mobilizing diaspora communities: they may have chased away the most talented members of the diaspora through political repression and dismal economic conditions. Or these countries may be overwhelmed by the continuing outflow of trained (and untrained people) from their land and lack the resources to respond to the diaspora challenge. And of course, most poor countries are besieged by crises, making reactive policies the norm.

But poor nations can proactively respond to the existence of growing diaspora communities by taking the following steps:

1) create a national agency to provide assistance to overseas citizens in keeping abreast of changes in their home country and adjusting to life there should they return to live or work. The national agency would also be responsible for promoting the use of ICT as a means of forging stronger ties between the homeland and its dispersed communities.

2) create a registry of skills possessed by members of a nation's overseas community. Data could be assembled by an independent NGO, using electronic survey forms, and shared with domestic and international employers.

Government could go further by creating an "internal Peace Corps," bringing skilled volunteers to their country, by drawing on retired or philanthropic-minded overseas nationals. Since poor nations rely heavily on foreign volunteers for a variety of tasks, the use of members of the diaspora community in this role would enhance self-reliance.

3) Endorse the creation of a non-partisan, independent NGO that studies the uses of remittances and seeks to direct the flow of these funds toward productive uses (as opposed to consumption to maintain living standards).

4) Endorse the creation of a private, independent business investment fund, whose resources would be drawn from the diaspora community. The diaspora fund would seek to earn a profit, but would presumably rely on a different compass than multinational corporations. Of course, many diaspora groups (notably Asian ones) informally pool investment capital for this purpose. However, such practices are virtually unknown in sub-Saharan Africa, so a formal program could provide an important role model for others to follow informally.

5) Legalize dual citizenship. While many Latin American and Caribbean countries allow dual citizenship, many Asian and African countries do not, creating a large legal barrier to participation by members of its overseas community who often are citizens of other countries. Once dual citizenship is allowed, governments can go further by providing voting rights to overseas nationals.

Wealthy nations need new policies on dispersed communities too. Wealthy nations ought to recognize the possibilities inherent in diaspora communities, since these communities often benefit wealthy nations by their presence. And yet wealthy countries and the elite multilateral agencies, such as the World Bank, that often coordinate the developed world's response to global issues have failed to incorporate an understanding of diaspora communities into their own aid and development programs. There are no empirical studies on this topic, but a cursory examination of Germany's foreign-aid effort reveals that the country makes no use of its large Ghanaian population (perhaps 50,000) in its substantial aid program to Ghana. The same observation applies to the U.S. To be sure, aid programs should not be handed over wholesale to diaspora groups, but isn't it logical

that people born in a country but now living elsewhere might have some special knowledge that could be leveraged?

To be sure, international relations are a main reason why rich nations keep a distance from diaspora groups. Rich countries often don't want to embarrass the political and business elites of poor countries by reminding them of the people they've lost (and diaspora groups often oppose the current government in their home land). Rich countries also are hungry for the talented people in poor countries. The government of Britain might be persuaded to place a ban on recruitment of doctors and nurses from Ghana, but it is inconceivable that it would promote the return to Ghana or even the systematic involvement in Ghana from a distance of the more than 100,000 Ghanaians living in Britain.

Wealthy countries also worry that their diaspora communities, if supported, will get up to no good politically. Without glossing over the debate over whether diaspora communities are any more prone to political violence and subversion than any other community, diaspora groups have supported violent movements in the past. Rich countries are often uncomfortable providing a safe haven for these diaspora energies (though often they do, as in the case of the anti-Castro Cuban community in the U.S.)

Finally, rich nations whether they have long traditions of absorbing immigrants or not are preoccupied with "integration," or at least accommodation, of newcomers to their territory. In the U.S., where the term "hyphenated American" sits comfortably with images of super-patriotism, people who align themselves too strongly with transnational communities remain suspect. With the exception of the interaction of Jewish Americans with Israel and anti-Castroites and Cuba, the U.S. government tends to frown on the long-term political projects between residents of the U.S. and their homelands. Diasporas are fine in the subterranean, but when allowed into the open these transnational affiliations sometimes not to a nation but rather a tribal group (the Pashtun, as opposed to the Afghan; the Ibo, as opposed to the Nigerian) they appear to pose a threat to the national unity of the wealthy nation. In my book, *The Global Me*, I argue why this is not so and why, when governments in rich countries allow diasporic consciousness among immigrants to surface, these governments end up promoting national unity, not undermining it, for the logical reason that people who are allowed to have their cake (life in America) and eat it too (free associations with Ibos around the world) are grateful and make for better citizens.

I won't repeat my argument except to suggest, as others have, that the concept of diaspora has universal applicability. The main features of diaspora a sense of exile, a need to construct a new community in a strange land, the ability to draw on global resources to do so sound striking like the main features of post-modern life and, more specifically, of contemporary American life and, increasingly, of life in western Europe.

Now this is not an academic point. If we are all members of the diaspora now -- or we can at least plausibly argue this -- policy makers have a wider range of choices open to them in dealing with new diasporas in their political jurisdictions because they may be

able to construct a domestic constituency for their policies based on appealing to the "diasporic outlook" of voters.

If policymakers in wealthy nations paid more attention to diasporas for the reasons above, they could fashion a set of policies that would draw on diaspora energies as a means of accelerating economic development in poor countries, advancing global equity. These policies would flow out of a new ethos of migration and immigration: a belief in a lifelong connection between dispersed communities and their homelands.

Note on sources: This paper is based on interviews and field research I conducted in the Bay Area, Ghana and elsewhere. I also draw on ideas and examples from my book, *The Global Me: New Cosmopolitans and the Competitive Edge* (2000).