

7-27-2018

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Recommended Citation

Asana, Lydia, "Inclusion of the African Diaspora in Florida Nonprofit Organizations" (2018). *2018 Program & Posters*. 27.
<https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/symposium2018/27>

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Inclusion of the African Diaspora in Florida Nonprofit Organizations

Lydia Asana, PhD

Problem

Despite decades of aid to the African continent, development efforts are often unsustainable (Moyo, 2009). Unsustainable development programs can undermine U.S. interests (Johnson, 2010) sometimes leading to instability that can adversely affect American security, economics, or support for American policies (United States Department of State, 2015)

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore opportunities and challenges of including members of the African diaspora community in Florida nonprofit development initiatives in Africa.

Significance.

Knowledge: Transnational traits of diaspora were shown to mirror areas of need identified by research participants.

Practice: Nonprofit leaders may gain tools for engaging African diaspora identified as a potential valuable resource for African Development.

Social Change Implications

Organizations: Improve personnel, programs, and progress

Target Communities: Increase access, commitment, impact

Culture: nonprofit and diaspora networks can improve organizational and development culture.

Theory or Framework

A global approach to **transnational theory of migration** considering unique migrant traits, simultaneous relationships and affects on their countries of settlement (Schiller, 2009) was employed.

Relevant Scholarship

Unsustainable development in Africa is documented and adversely affects both African and American interests (Johnson, 2010). Investing in foreign development promotes American interests and is not simply “charity” but “a strategic imperative for America” according to former Secretary of State John Kerry (United States Department of State, 2013).

The African diaspora refers to all persons from the African continent living abroad irrespective of citizenship, engaged in African development efforts (African Union, n.d.). These diasporans have been identified as a valuable resource for African development (Brinkerhoff, 2016, Bodomo, 2013, OECD, 2012) because of their financial, human, social, and political capital (Brinkerhoff, 2012).

Applying diaspora knowledge and experience by utilizing transnational traits of social ties and ongoing relationships in multiple countries (Akeampong, 2010, Faist, 2010) can benefit countries of settlement (Triandafyllidou, 2009) like the United States.

Wilson (2013) found that immigrants tend to trust nonprofit organizations. However, literature exploring nonprofit - diaspora collaboration is limited, providing a gap that this research sought to contribute to. Gubser (2011) documented an example of a development project that was unsustainable due to lack of local buy-in and involvement in the target country. Diaspora transnational tendencies may be helpful in realizing lasting, positive, development impact.

Research Question

What are barriers to success and opportunities to including African diaspora members in Florida-based nonprofit organizations that carry out development programs in Africa?

Participants

Leaders ($N = 21$) of eligible Florida nonprofit organizations were recruited via purposeful snowball sampling.

Leaders included chief executive officers and chief operating officers, as well as development, program, and volunteer directors.

Procedures

Semi structured interviews were conducted using a researcher-created protocol with ten questions.

Interviews lasted 20-50 minutes depending on the number of follow up questions posed. Interview notes were taken on the protocol and an audio recording made.

Review of public records including annual reports, flyers, pamphlets, and social media of participating organizations provided context and characteristics.

Coding and member checking, countered bias and enhanced research integrity.

Analysis

Both manual and computer assisted methods were utilized to generate codes and themes used for analysis of data by comparing and contrasting.

Findings

Barriers: Lack of awareness / networks; minimal engagement of diaspora; limited individual services & locations; limited resources; volunteer positions only.

Opportunities: Interest in diaspora engagement; identified value of diaspora; diverse combined services and locations; diaspora commitment, skills, & global experience; offer variety of roles e.g. advisor or board

Interpretation

Knowledge Gap: Knowledge of, and networks between, Florida nonprofits was limited. Value of engaging diaspora Africans and knowledge of how to do so were also limited.

Practice Gap: Recommendations for building networks & valuing transnational traits of diaspora can support sustainable development efforts of nonprofits.

Most development projects of participating organizations reflect UN Sustainable Development Goals, potential selling point for resource development

Limitations

Findings and interpretations are highly dependent on the commitment of participants and skill of the researcher.

Recommendations

Practice: Build nonprofit networks; explore diaspora engagement; highlight collective diversity of service and location; recognize valued diaspora transnational traits; purposefully pursue diaspora

Future Research: Nonprofit leaders were willing participants with potential to implement; consider using event to collect data, measure implementation outcomes; vary setting or population for qualitative research; Conduct quantitative survey using qualitative findings.

Acknowledgements

*Dissertation Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Mark Gordon (chair), Dr. Mi Young Lee (member), Dr. Gregory Dixon (URR)*