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**Alliance for Brain- Gain and Innovative Development (ABIDE):**

**Mobilizing Ethiopia's Vital Diaspora Resources for Capacity Building and Social Change**

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Ethiopia's aspirations to fast-track sustainable development are dependent on availability of qualified and experienced human resources. At present the country is experiencing extreme shortages of such professionals to meet the demand of the expansion of infrastructure. The two major causes for the shortage are (a) limited capacity in education and training programs, and (b) the massive exodus of highly qualified professionals over the last four decades. These have depleted Ethiopia's human capital leading to compromise in quality and global competitiveness. Engaging the brain power of its professionals in the Diaspora is one approach to ensure the fulfillment of the country's quest for rapid growth. In this regard, Ethiopia requires strategic collaboration, partnership and networking among all its stakeholders. The Ethiopian Diaspora, including their second and third generations, is among the critical resources whose maximum mobilization and engagement are indispensable. This paper presents efforts being made by an indigenous non-governmental organization, Alliance For Brain Gain and Innovative Development (ABIDE), to facilitate streamlining of institutionalized mechanisms, systems, processes and policies to mainstream and increase the ease through which qualified and skilled Ethiopians in the Diaspora and friends of Ethiopia could engage in partnership with professionals and institutions in the country to address the knowledge, skills and technology gaps and contribute to Ethiopia's capacity building for sustainable development and social change; which also in the long run could contribute to attenuating brain drain. The paper highlights some achievements and constraints.

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## 1. Introduction

International migration has become an increasingly important feature in a globalized world. The push and pull factors have increased the outflow of educated and skilled individuals from developing to the rich and developed countries that offer good security, better economic and social opportunities. Over the last 40 years, the number of persons living outside their country of origin has more than doubled. Today over 200 million people are migrants. It is estimated that worldwide one in every 35 persons is a migrant. The increase in outflow of educated and skilled individuals from developing to the rich and developed world has remained one of the complex development challenges for the developing world. For many poor countries the share of skilled nationals residing in rich countries is staggeringly high. It is estimated that for many countries in Africa about a quarter of their citizens with tertiary education live in OECD countries. According to Dumont and Lemaitre (2005), countries like Serra Leon, Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana and Mozambique have between up to 30 percent to close to 50percent of their highly skilled populations abroad. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Africa has lost one third of its skilled human capital and is continuing to lose at an increasing rate, with an estimated 20,000 skilled professionals leaving the continent annually since 1990. It is estimated that about 30,000 African's holding PhDs live and work outside the continent (Shinn 2008). Shinn's report also reveals that approximately 65,000 African-born physicians and 70,000 African-born professional nurses were working overseas in developed countries by 2000. This represented about one-fifth of all African-born physicians and one-tenth of African-born professional nurses. In 2006, the World Health Organization reported that out of fifty-seven countries worldwide suffering from a severe shortage of health workers, thirty-six were in Africa. African countries spend more than \$4 billion annually- representing about 35 Percent of total official development aid to the continent - to employ 100,000 expatriates to fill professional gaps created by migration.

The gaining rich countries on the other hand have strategically developed mechanisms to attract skills to meet their society's socio-economic aspirations. Some have allocated financial resources and designed visa programmers to attract highly skilled persons from Africa and elsewhere while others actively recruit for certain skills that are in short supply. The recent progress in social and economic development of some Asian countries has attracted the Diasporas from these countries to return to their country of origin. The

author believes that this phenomenon could result in increasing the enormity and worsening trend of brain drain from Africa as this could trigger stronger pull from the developed world to meet their expanding needs. Africa therefore would require strategic approaches and urgent actions to meet the increasing demand for experienced, skilled and talented work force necessary for its own national development programs presently some countries in Africa are introducing strategies to address the problem as it strongly impacts on their overall socio-economy, science and technology development. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) explicitly mentions a need to "reverse the brain drain" in its framework document (2009). This recognition among African leaders underscores the magnitude of the problem and why addressing it is crucial to the continent's development.

## **2. The Brain Drain Situation in Ethiopia,**

Ethiopia - a country in eastern Africa, has one of the highest African Diaspora populations (IOM, 2009). It is estimated that there are about 2 million Ethiopian migrants. Ethiopia has been losing much of its educated workforce. Although clear quantitative data are lacking the consensus is that migration of qualified human resources has negatively affected Ethiopia's over all socioeconomic progress and, especially, the health, education, science and technology sectors. Brain drain began to seriously affect the country in the mid 1970s when educated and skilled professionals started to leave the country in large numbers. Some studies even show that Ethiopia lost more than 75 percent of its professionals in the 1980s. The exodus still continues further depleting the country's meager human capital. Compared to about 1000 doctors that live in Ethiopia to serve about 80 million people, the number of Ethiopian medical doctors living in North America is estimated between 3 and 5 thousand. Anecdotal information indicates that over the last four decades, the country has lost 30-35 percent of its skilled and educated professionals. For instance, out of the more than 450 thousand Ethiopians in the United States, over 30 percent have first degrees and above. Similarly, it is estimated that around the 3 to 4 thousand Ethiopians and Germans with Ethiopian background, about 20 percent hold a degree at the bachelor's level or above (GTZ, 2009). Ethiopians that established residence in

other countries (nowadays referred to as the Ethiopian Diaspora) have acquired the attitude and mindset necessary to survive in their new environment and are making significant contributions to the growth and development of those countries. They have developed skills and expertise in various areas that are required of them to succeed in a competitive world. In addition, some have acquired considerable financial capital which may also contribute to the remittances and the investment environment in Ethiopia. The much needed skilled intellectual brainpower of Ethiopians in the Diaspora is a loss (or gain to the receiving countries) equivalent to billions of dollars to the country. However under the proper setting and enabling policy environment the Diaspora can offer meaningful and sustained contributions through capacity building and brain gain towards Ethiopia's sustainable development. The Ethiopian Diaspora can be classified in to two groups. First are those Diaspora members, who left the country after they have acquired knowledge, skill and experiences in the country and who are familiar with the socio-cultural and institutional settings as well as identify with, and are strongly attached and committed to give back to the country and its people. Second, are the second and third generation Ethiopians in the Diaspora. These energetic groups, with liberated mindsets, are products of both cultures which confers them special advantage having derived the synergy from the two<sup>2</sup> US Census, American Community Survey, 2006 and 2007.<sup>5</sup> cultures. Therefore, they are open to change and have the propensity to be innovative and productive. The author believes that, with proper mentoring and motivation, these energetic groups have a tremendous potential to contribute to socioeconomic science and technology development in Ethiopia. Engaging these young professionals to partner with their Ethiopian counterparts as well as with senior professionals and scientists (for mentorship) can help Ethiopia to leapfrog towards socio-economic and technological transformation and accelerated development. The young in the Diaspora would also learn more about their roots. Ethiopia's efforts for accelerated have led to unprecedented expansion of higher education facilities nationwide. However, the country is experiencing extreme shortage of highly qualified and experienced professionals to meet the demand due to its limited capacity in education and training programs and also due to brain drain over the last four decades. These two factors have depleted Ethiopia's human capital leading to compromise in quality and global competitiveness. In recent years the Diaspora's potential to contribute to Ethiopia's

capacity building and development efforts is getting the attention and acknowledgement of the Government. Efforts are being made to facilitate partnership and create collaboration with committed Ethiopians in the Diaspora. Success in this endeavor will help to harness this vital potential and to redirect the 'brain drain' into 'brain gain' by allowing the Diasporas to play a significant role in the development and prosperity of their country of origin. On the other hand, there is also a growing realization by the Ethiopian Diaspora of their unique position and role to meaningfully partner, and contribute to the country's development efforts. Many members, some individually, and others in groups are involved in various development sectors. However these actions, though considerable, have primarily been based on individual efforts, often motivated by professionals in the Diaspora and have been sporadic, spontaneous and even unsustainable. According to IOM information (IOM Report 2004) several of these professionals with qualifications ranging from diplomas to post-graduate/doctoral degrees, have expressed interest to participate in development initiatives in Ethiopia through investment as well as through intellectual and technological input through virtual arrangements, onetime missions, sequenced repeat visits, short term, medium and long term visits, and or through other modalities or even through permanent relocation. Formal and informal interactions of the present author with some professionals in the diaspora also confirm IOM's observation. The rapid expansion of infrastructure in the public, private and NGO sectors; the increasing interest among Diaspora professionals to participate in the country's development, the availability of committed professionals in the country willing to partner with the Diaspora to meet their institution's developmental goals; the increasingly positive trend in global, regional and bilateral thinking in acknowledging the value and wisdom of tapping into Diaspora resources for development are some of the opportunities that would facilitate Ethiopia's brain gain

### **3. Efforts to address brain-drain in Ethiopia**

### 3.1 Establishment of Alliance for Brain Gain and Innovative Development – ABIDE

It is in the above context that Alliance for Brain-Gain and Innovative Development (ABIDE) came into being as an indigenous, non-governmental not-for-profit development organization with primary focus to increase Ethiopia's opportunities for *brain gain*. ABIDE was initially established and registered in January 2006, as '*Hibret Lelimat Ma'ekel*(HLM)' and later re-registered with a new brand name '*Alliance for Brain-Gain and Innovative Development* (ABIDE)', on 30 November 2009, by the Ethiopian Societies and Charities Agency as per Government Proclamation 621/2009. ABIDE endeavors to streamlining of institutionalized mechanisms, systems, processes and policies to mainstream and increase the ease through which qualified and skilled Ethiopians in the Diaspora and Friends of Ethiopia (EDFE) could engage in partnership with professionals and institutions in the country to address the knowledge, skills and technology gaps and contribute to Ethiopia's sustainable development and social change. And, in the long run, to contribute to attenuating brain drain. ABIDE is premised on the following three observations.

1. The unabated hemorrhage (brain drain) of highly qualified and experienced professionals from Ethiopia during the last four decades has seriously denuded the human capital leaving existing and new institutions and development sectors with a dire need for such manpower;

2. Many countries who experienced such brain loss have successfully and effectively engaged their Diaspora professionals by crafting enabling policies, strategies and modalities for participation; thereby deriving considerable benefit from them; that Ethiopia can learn from countries such as India, China, Korea, Taiwan etc., and begin implementing such an undertaking; and,

3. Both the Government of Ethiopia and many members of Ethiopian Diaspora have acknowledged the contribution that the Diaspora can make in the country's development.

Ethiopian Diaspora can play unique roles in national capacity building and sustainable development. There by changing *brain drain* into *brain gain*.

In recent years, Ethiopia is engaged in massive and unprecedented expansion of development initiatives and infrastructure, especially, in education, health, science and technology, trade and industry, engineering, construction and environment sectors. However, with the continued exodus of best talents and highly skilled professionals these efforts have been severely constrained. ABIDE believes that the rich intellectual resources that exist within the Ethiopian Diaspora community could make significant contributions to Ethiopia's institutional capacity building and sustainable development if and when enabling systems and efficient mechanisms for engagement are put in place. It also believes that through the overall socio-economy and technological development of the country, the exodus of qualified professionals from the country could be lessened. Hence ABIDE, is committed to facilitate the establishment of structured and sustainable systems to effectively mobilize and engage skilled members of the Ethiopian Diaspora and friends of Ethiopia (EDFE) to mitigate the acute shortage of qualified and experienced human resources. It also aspires to building synergistic and win-win partnerships, sustainable collaboration as well as mutually beneficial relationships among professionals in the Diaspora and those in the country thereby contributing to national capacity building and also offsetting the adverse effects of brain drain.

ABIDE is, therefore, established to:

- Create an entry point for incremental channeling of the Diaspora's resources for capacity building and social change;
- Facilitate processes to foster enhanced exchange and transfer of knowledge, skills and technology to address gaps in various priority areas;
- Contribute to human capital development including attenuate brain drain in the long run; Enhance two-way enriching and rewarding benefits in scientific, economic, social and educational capabilities;

- Promote North-South and South-South collaboration to create and strengthen centers of excellence/competence with the Diaspora as a bridge;
- Re-establish dialogue between professionals in and out of the country for synergistic partnerships;
- Foster network among youth in and out of the country thus sowing the seeds for lasting partnerships; and,
- Introduce tested and emerging know how, skills and technologies that are relevant to the country developmental needs.

ABIDE is the only indigenous NGO established with a focus on ***brain-gain*** for the sole purpose of contributing to national development through synergistic partnership and collaboration between Ethiopian Professionals in the Diaspora 7 with those professionals and institutions in the country. ABIDE is made up of its founding members, a General Assembly(GA), auditor, accountant and a nine-member Board elected by the GA to provide oversight and guidance to the organization. It's Managing Director, also appointed by the Board as its Secretary is the founder of the organization and is responsible to provide executive leadership and ensure the implementation of annual work plans and preparation of annual activity and financial report. On a yearly basis the GA endorses the annual activity and audit reports and review and approve the work plan and proposed budget for the following year. The organization has its headquarter in Addis Ababa and is currently located at the Akaki Campus of the Addis Ababa University. It continues to establish contact persons in countries with a large number of Ethiopian Diaspora professionals. Its Website ([www.abideethiopia.org](http://www.abideethiopia.org)) serves as a means for information exchange, networking, reach out to Diaspora and Friends of Ethiopia professionals; serve as an information resource on Ethiopia's brain gain, and database on professional Diaspora resources and human resource needs. The Website will also serve as a platform to match human resource needs to available professional expertise within the Diaspora and friends of Ethiopia Diaspora



### 3.2 Major Achievements

ABIDE operates in partnership with national and international organizations, the Diaspora, and stakeholders from within and outside the country having particular interests in Diaspora engagement for national capacity building. This is tenable the mobilization and incremental channeling of Diaspora's intellectual, technical and related resources for the country's sustainable development. In this regard, it works closely with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Capacity Building, Education, Health, Youth and Sports and Ministry of Science and Technology. It also collaborates with institutions of higher learning and has signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) with Addis Ababa University, Mekelle, Jimma, Gondar and Bahir-Dar Universities, St. Mary's University College in Addis Ababa. MoUs have also been signed with People To People (P2P), Association for Higher Education and Development(AHEAD), Voluntary Service Organization (VSO) Ethiopia, VSO Canada, and African Diaspora Policy Center (ADPC).It continues its networking and partnership building that also extends to organizations including, Ethiopian Academy of Sciences (EAS), Ethiopian Knowledge and Technology Society (EKTTS), International Organization on Migration (IOM),American International Health Alliances Twinning Center (TC), Ethiopian North American Health Professionals Association (ENAHPA), Network of Migration Research On Africa (NOMRA), Academy of the Developing World(TWAS) International Migration For Development (IMFD), International Center for Migration Policy Development(ICMPD) and HIV/AIDS Prevention Support Community Organization (HAPSCO).Since its establishment in January 2006, the organization has been actively involved in advocacy using various means for consensus building, and in information and networking with institutions in the country as well as professionals in Diaspora. ABIDE has also conducted preliminary needs assessment of selected institutions and initiated the development of database on professionals, academicians and researchers in the Diaspora. A national symposium was organized presided by key government and non-government officials, ambassadors, heads of national and international organizations, development agencies, institutions of higher learning, and key sectors including

education, health and foreign affairs sectors. A number of participants from members of the Diaspora including those serving in the country attended the symposium. The main purpose of the symposium was for advocacy and to mobilize support and consensus to enhance Diaspora's participation in national development. Useful recommendations emerged from the deliberations that called for urgent strategic priority actions (HLM National Symposium Proceedings August 2008) through collaboration with AHEAD, VSO Ethiopia and VSO Canada a successful pilot project was carried out to engage Ethiopian Diaspora professionals within the VSO Ethiopia program. As part of the pilot activity, ABIDE facilitated the placement of the first three Diaspora professional volunteers from Canada (two male and a female) who successfully engaged in activities for a period of three to six months. They worked in the Addis Ababa University Medical Faculty, Medical Education Unit, HAPSCO and ABIDE respectively. Based on the success of the pilot project, VSO Ethiopia<sup>8</sup> carried out a feasibility study and has now developed a five years (2010-2014) strategic plan that incorporated the mobilization and engagement of professional Diaspora volunteers within its country programme. A joint action plan has also been drawn between ABIDE and Addis Ababa University, for effective and systematic mobilization and engagement of Ethiopian professionals, academicians and researchers in the Diaspora and Friends of Ethiopia for the realization of the University's fast tracked training of 10,000 postgraduate and 2500 PhDs over the next five years. Ethiopia's aspiration to fast track sustainable development is dependent on the extent of progress it makes in education, health, industry, agriculture, environment science and technology. Engaging the brain power of its professionals in the Diaspora including the second and third generations is among the critical resources whose maximum mobilization and engagement is imperative to ensure the fulfillment of the country's quest for rapid growth. In this regard, Ethiopia needs strategic collaboration, partnership and networking among all its stakeholders. As the enormity and worsening trend of the problem is expected to continue, urgent and strategic actions need to be taken involving various stakeholders to mitigate the problem that call upon national, regional and global players for a new era of constructive engagement in brain gain. Through its action and efforts ABIDE has managed to acquire recognition and has gained the confidence of institutions and professionals in and out of the country as a promising and timely organization that can facilitate and

achieve increased participation of Diaspora professionals to contribute to national development. This has raised expectations on the roles that ABIDE can play to effectively facilitate brain-gain for Ethiopia's social change. ABIDE is striving to meet these expectations.

### **3.3 Main Challenges**

Inadequate policy framework and mechanisms for systematic coordination to effectively mobilize and facilitate processes for Diaspora engagement,

- Limited integration of efforts in the country and in the Diaspora resulting in fragmented and piece-meal approaches as opposed to the desired holistic and sustainable actions,
- Lack of accurate information on the extent and qualification of the Diaspora community resulting in limited awareness and appreciation on potentials that exist within the Diaspora,
- Lack of complete and up-to-date information on priority human resource needs of the various priority institutions in the country, □ Inadequate understanding by the Diaspora community on the challenges faced by institutions and professionals in the country,
- Limited financial resources to strengthen ABIDE's institutional capacity to undertake tasks required to mobilize the Diaspora to support country's capacity building efforts. (till date the author who is also the Managing Director and a full time volunteer uses her family financial resources to cover over eighty percent of the organization's operational cost),
- Limited organization of the Diaspora community making efforts more individual, fragmented, unorganized and even unsustainable,

## **4. Conclusions**

To effectively engage the Diaspora in capacity building for the country's sustainable development it is important to have easily accessible, up-to-date information on the country's qualified human resource needs in priority institutions; as well as up-to-date database on available Diaspora knowledge, technical and intellectual resources for information exchange on demand and supply and for proactive and accountable planning and implementation.

1) It is also important to streamline processes and policy frameworks to create enabling environment to facilitate sustainable engagement of the Diaspora for brain gain in mutually respectful and synergistic partnership between professionals in the Diaspora and those in the country enhancing two-way enriching and rewarding benefits unscientific, economic, social and educational capabilities. Important and critical is also the development of systems that would encourage staff retention and attenuate the exodus of qualified professionals from the country

.2) It is incumbent upon the developed and rich countries in the world to have policy frameworks that are responsive and coherent to supporting developing nations to retain their qualified human resources so that their investment in higher education and in human capital is directly channeled in to their development. These countries could also create policies and programmes that would support the efforts of the Diaspora to contribute to the development of their country of origin. It would be helpful if International and Regional Development organization could facilitate the creation of platforms for dialogue on global social responsibilities.

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