



Utilizing Multidisciplinary Research to Enhance Home-Diaspora Community Engagement

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Wisconsin Interdisciplinary Research Symposium

6 June 2025

Introduction: Why diaspora engagement is the untapped engine of global development

At least **280.5m** people of the global population - live in a country other than their country of origin **3%**

One in three Migration Governance Indicators (MGI) countries globally engages its diaspora in agenda setting and implementation of development policy.

Two-third of countries globally accepted dual citizenship.

Migrants are estimated to generate **9.4%** of global GDP

There are more than **200,000** diaspora and migrant organizations.

Largest diasporas: India (17.5 million), Mexico (11.8 million), China (10.7 million)

Largest destination countries: United States (est. 41 million), Germany (10.4 million), United Kingdom (7.4 million)

The African diaspora is large (almost **350 million**) and growing thanks to a second economic migration wave post-1945

Why This Matters Now

Problem: "Global crises demand new solutions."

Solution: "Diasporas offer networks, capital, and innovation."

The post-pandemic world is reshaping how nations interact with their diasporas.

Inflation, migration, and democratic backsliding are pushing countries to look beyond traditional institutions.

At the same time, global diasporas are more networked, mobile, and engaged than ever before.

We're seeing a convergence: greater need at home, and greater capacity abroad.

Interdisciplinary research can help us navigate this space—designing systems that turn remittances into investment, emotional ties into institution-building, and cultural influence into policy leverage.

The Nigerian Diaspora – An Overview



Nigeria's diaspora is estimated at over 17 million people—mostly in Benin (~6 million), Cameroon (~4 million), Ghana (~1 million), the US (est. ~760,000 of which ~476,000 are foreign-born), UK (~293,000), Niger (~155,000), Canada (~112,000), Italy (~106,000) and Germany (~100,000).

In 2024 alone, they sent home \$20.98 billion in remittances—more than Nigeria earned from oil.

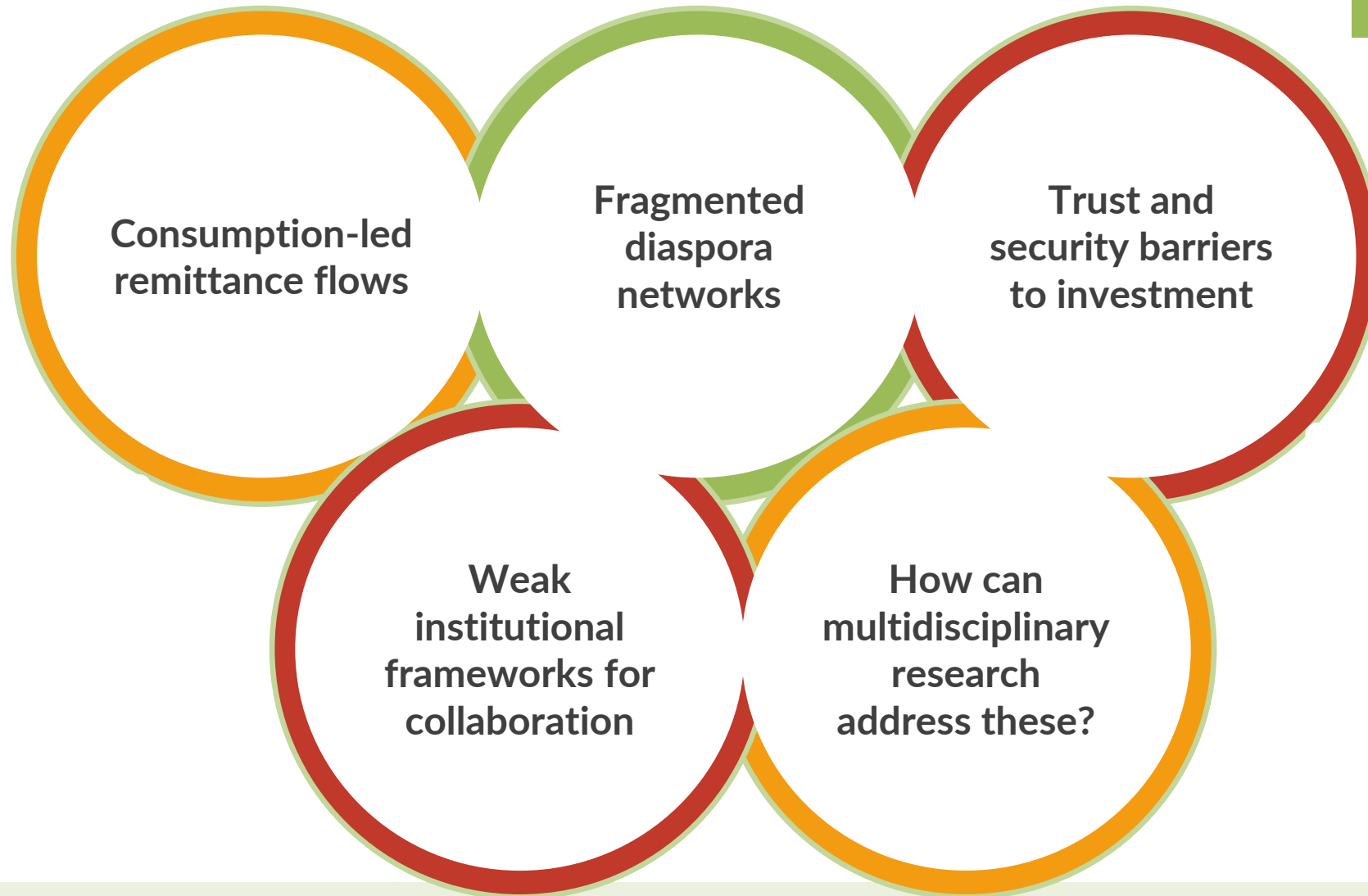
They are also well-educated: 64% hold tertiary degrees compared to just 11% domestically.

Beyond economics, they influence politics and culture—driving Afrobeats, Nollywood, literature, and even forming swing voting blocs in Western congressional/parliamentary races.

Much of their financial power is consumed, not invested. That's a key issue we'll explore.

Sources: Pew Research Center; ACS-US Census Bureau; ONS; Statistics Canada; Migration Policy

Challenges in Current Diaspora Engagement



Multidisciplinary Insights

Here's where multidisciplinary research becomes essential:

Economics

offers tools to design diaspora bonds and investment frameworks.

Political science

analyzes and prescribes opportunities for electoral engagement, lobbying, and judicial reform.

Sociology

explains how trust, identity, and kinship shape diaspora behavior.

Public health and education

research guides knowledge repatriation and remote service models.

Development studies

help us understand how all of this fits into long-term national strategies.

Combining these disciplines enables us to ask better questions and build stronger interventions

Lessons from Other Countries

Several countries have effectively institutionalized diaspora engagement.



India benefited from its returning tech diaspora, which helped build Bangalore's global IT hub.



China incentivized its diaspora to return and set up innovation zones.



Israel's multi-decade engagement with its diaspora has led to billions in capital inflows into its agricultural, biomedical, finance and tech sectors. These examples show that with the right incentives, policy frameworks, and political will, diaspora engagement can be transformative.

What can Africa learn from these models?

Policy & Institutional Frameworks

Nigeria has a diaspora commission supervised by the foreign ministry but there are growing calls for a diaspora affairs ministry like Ghana.

State of the African Diaspora: A 'Sixth Region' set up by the African Union in 2018 pursuant to a 2003 AU Heads of State declaration complete with a Prime Minister, ministers-with-portfolios and 'ambassadors' resident in home and destination countries and a few 'diplomatic missions'

Creating safe investment corridors in tech, agriculture, and infrastructure

Public-private partnerships to derisk investments

Legal reforms to protect investor rights

Without these foundations, even the most generous diaspora efforts will struggle to scale.

Proposed Models of Engagement

Diaspora bonds to finance large infrastructure (such as Lagos-Calabar road/rail line) with learnings from Israel (longest standing diaspora bond program) and India (has two bond tracks that target Non-Resident Indians). Nigeria is currently designing one.

Diaspora investment vehicles, including VC funds targeting startups in growth sectors such as fintech, healthtech, and agritech

Establish more charitable Donor-Advised Funds (DAFs): African Diaspora Network (ADN) and Myriad USA are set to launch the African Diaspora Innovation Fund (AfDIF). Aims to mobilize \$1 million in six months, with an average tax-deductible donor contribution of \$500.

Knowledge return programs, enabling short-term expert deployments in critical sectors including arts, health, manufacturing and academia

Remote education and digital skills academies (like AltSchool or Andela)

Diaspora-led civic platforms for media reform, fact-checking, and election monitoring

These models are actionable, scalable, and rooted in real-world successes.

The Role of Research in Driving Solutions

Research is not a side activity—it is the foundation. Multidisciplinary studies help us:

1

Identify barriers to diaspora trust and participation

2

Understand which sectors are investment-ready

3

Design pilot programs and track results

4

Build feedback loops between policy and practice

5

Collaborations between universities, diaspora networks, and governments are key. We need more applied research that connects people, capital, and ideas across borders.

Recommendations

1

Leverage centralized diaspora coordination platform such as iDiaspora.org

2

Offer investment incentives and secure pathways for return migration

3

Build sector-specific engagement zones in agriculture, tech, and education

4

Use research – ideally longitudinal, cross-disciplinary research on diaspora impact – to align diaspora strategies with national development plans

5

Encourage pan-African dialogue among diasporas to share lessons

Conclusion



Q&A / Discussion

- **Invite questions**
- **Prompt for participant reflections or related country experiences**

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