

1 How Do We Reverse the Brain Drain?

Philip Emeagwali



My Quest for an Internet

In this, the 25th installment of our weekly series at emeagwali.com, we present Part 1/6 of Philip Emeagwali's widely-quoted lecture on reversing the brain drain from Africa.

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The lecture [video](#) is posted at emeagwali.com and youtube.com/emeagwali

by [Philip Emeagwali](#)

emeagwali.com

For 10 million African-born emigrants, the word "home" is synonymous with the United States, Britain or other country outside of Africa.

Personally, I have lived continuously in the United States for the past 30 years. My last visit to Africa was 17 years ago.

On the day I left Nigeria, I felt sad because I was leaving my family behind. I believed I would return eight years later, probably marry an Igbo girl, and then spend the rest of my life in Nigeria.

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Dale and I got married on August 15, 1981 in Baltimore, Maryland.

But 25 years ago, I fell in love with an American girl, married her three years later, and became eligible to sponsor a Green Card visa for my 35 closest relatives, including my parents and all my siblings, nieces and nephews.

The story of how I brought 35 people to the United States exemplifies how 10 million skilled people have emigrated out of Africa during the past 30 years. We came to the United States on student visas and then changed our status to become permanent residents and then naturalized citizens. Our new citizenship status helped us sponsor relatives, and also inspired our friends to immigrate here.

Ten million Africans now constitute an invisible nation that resides outside Africa. Although invisible, it is a nation as populous as Angola, Malawi, Zambia or Zimbabwe. *If it were to be a nation with distinct borders, it would have an income roughly equivalent to Africa's gross domestic product.*

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Although the *African Union* does not recognize the African Diaspora as a nation, the *International Monetary Fund (IMF)* acknowledges its economic importance. The IMF estimates the African Diaspora now constitutes the biggest group of foreign investors in Africa.

Nigeria achieved political independence in 1960, but by the year 2000 had not yet achieved technological independence.

Take for example *Western Union*. It estimates that it is not atypical for an immigrant to wire \$300 per month to relatives in Africa. If you assume that most Africans living outside Africa send money each month and you do

What few realize is that Africans who immigrate to the United States contribute 40 times more wealth to the American than to the African economy. According to the United Nations, an African professional working in the United States contributes about \$150,000 per year to the U.S. economy.

Again, if you do the math, you will realize that the African professional remitting \$300 per month to Africa is contributing 40 times more to the United States economy than to the African one. On a relative scale, that means for every \$300 per month a

the math, you will agree with the IMF that the African Diaspora is indeed the largest foreign investor in Africa.



A few years ago, Zambia had 1,600 medical doctors. Today, Zambia has only 400 medical doctors.... A similar story is told from South Africa to Ghana.

professional African sends home, that person contributes \$12,000 per month to the U.S. economy.

Of course, the issue more important than facts and figures is eliminating poverty in Africa, not merely reducing it by sending money to relatives. Money alone cannot eliminate poverty in Africa, because even one million dollars is a number with no intrinsic value. Real wealth cannot be measured by money, yet we often confuse money with wealth. Under the status quo, Africa would still remain poor even if we were to send all the money in the world there.

Ask someone who is ill what "wealth" means, and you will get a very different answer than from most other people. If you were HIV-positive, you would gladly exchange one million dollars to become HIV-negative.

When you give your money to your doctor, that physician helps you convert your money into health - or rather, wealth.



My mother Agatha, my wife Dale, and me at a party in Baltimore, Maryland (August 1984)

Money cannot teach your children. Teachers can. Money cannot bring electricity to your home. Engineers can. Money cannot cure sick people. Doctors can. Because it is only a nation's human capital that can be converted into real wealth, that

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human capital is much more valuable than its financial capital.

A few years ago, Zambia had 1,600 medical doctors. Today, Zambia has

only 400 medical doctors. Kenya retains only 10% of the nurses and doctors trained there. A similar story is told from South Africa to Ghana.

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Philip Emeagwali, keynote speaker, Pan-African Conference on Brain Drain, Principia College, Elsah, Illinois, October 24, 2003.

My heart shed tears for the revelations

I read Phillip's speech at the Pan African Conference in the Guardian newspapers today. I've had so much about the man and his brilliance but it was something else to read his rather calculated prophetic insights into ending the brain drain syndrome. Honestly, I felt as if I was reading a "bible" of sort on a future that's almost here for Africa. I was in the car and my heart shed tears for the revelations before me.

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Kindly give me this man's e-mail. He is definitely a rare breed - one in a generation. I need to send him a personal mail on certain issues.

Thanks
Tope Ayedun
Lagos, Nigeria

WEBMISTRESS' NOTE: Visitors from the continent can read Emeagwali's speech as reproduced in *Guardian* (Nigeria, Nov. 4, 2003), *New Age* (Nigeria, Oct. 28 & 30, 2003), *Champion* (Nigeria, Oct. 29, 2003), *The Accra Daily Mail* (Ghana, Oct. 28, 2003), *Moneyweb* (Johannesburg, Oct. 27, 2003)

Chief Philip..an admiration from an Eritrean guy.

Wow, I really loved your article on an African Diaspora simple Economics. In fact, you are kind of changing my mind to consider and be part of this high-tech African "brain-gain" business and create a wealth. I do not have a clue how to do it now, but I will try.

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Mr. Emeagwali,

I come across your site while conducting research for a graduate-level course in International Management. I found your comments about brain drain in African nations quite intriguing. Most notably, while I was aware of the problem, it never occurred to me to connect brain drain with the overwhelming problem of corruption in African nations. My comments regarding your research have prompted quite a debate, and I wanted to let you know that I enjoyed your site and will continue to rely on it for valuable information (properly cited, of course) in my studies.

Sincerely,

Nick Holmes

Graduate Student

Wayland Baptist University

Lubbock, Texas

Dear Dr. Emeagwali,

I wish to commend you on your giant strides in the world of technology in general, and computer in particular. Today, many Nigerians, Africans and non-Africans all aspire to attain your height.

I am an ardent lover of your technological innovations and your personality in particular. Recently, I joined the "Friends of Emeagwali".

I am a young budding writer and have written some essays and written radio commentaries, although my efforts are being militated against by Nigerians' (both individuals and Government) indifference to academics in particular, and the youths in general.

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In one of my radio commentaries, I wrote a few lines about you. The commentary is entitled: "Brain Drain in Africa: the Nigerian Story." (I will send you that soon). I was of the opinion that if the Nigerian educational sector had all that it takes to harness our potentialities, some personalities like you would have been in Nigeria contributing to Nation-Building, and Nigeria would have been better placed in the world of technology.

I want to write more about you. Due to the under developed economy we have in Nigeria, access to the Internet is restricted to the rich, who have both monopolized and commercialized it, and made it very costly. So, I go to the Internet only once a while I get a "dash" from my cousin who comes home occasionally. To this end, please, send me your comprehensive autobiography or your biography to enable me write a voluminous newspaper publication. My postal address is: P.O. Box 439, Awka 420001, Anambra State. I also need your personal e-mail address for any correspondence. I hope to hear from you.

Once more, I congratulate you on your achievements.

C'Neke Anagbogu

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Bente Morse (conference planner) and Philip Emeagwali at the Pan-African Conference on Brain Drain (Principia Guest House, Principia College, Elsah, Illinois, October 26, 2003)

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by Philip Emeagwali

emeagwali.com

Keynote speech by [Emeagwali](#) at the Pan African Conference on Brain Drain, Elsau, Illinois on October 24, 2003. [French](#) translation provided by Abdoulaye CAMARA of [AfricaMaat](#).

Merci pour cette plaisante introduction et pour m'avoir invité à partager mes idées sur la transformation de la "fuite des cerveaux" en "profit des cerveaux."

Pour 10 millions d'émigrés africains nés hors du continent, le terme "maison" correspond aux Etats-Unis, à la Grande-Bretagne ou à tout autre pays hors d'Afrique.

Personnellement, je vis aux Etats-Unis depuis les 30 dernières années. Ma dernière visite en Afrique remonte à 17 ans maintenant.

Le jour où j'ai quitté le Nigeria, j'ai ressenti une grande tristesse parce que je laissais ma famille derrière moi. J'ai cru que je reviendrais huit ans plus tard, que j'épouserai une Igbo, et que je passerai alors le reste de ma vie au Nigeria.

Mais il y a 25 ans, je suis tombé amoureux d'une américaine, nous nous sommes mariés trois ans plus tard, et j'ai pu obtenir une carte verte pour 35 des membres de ma famille la plus proche, y compris mes parents et tous mes cousins, nièces et neveux.

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C'est de la même manière que 10 millions de personnes qualifiées ont émigré hors d'Afrique pendant ces 30 dernières années. Nous sommes venus aux Etats-Unis grâce à des visas d'étudiant, pour ensuite devenir des résidents permanents et enfin des citoyens naturalisés. Notre nouvelle citoyenneté nous a permis d'aider nos parents à nous rejoindre, et a également encouragé nos amis à immigrer ici.

Dix millions d'Africains constituent maintenant une nation invisible résidant hors d'Afrique. Bien qu'invisible, il s'agit d'une nation aussi peuplée que l'Angola, le Malawi, la Zambie ou le Zimbabwe. Si cette nation avait des frontières distinctes, elle aurait un produit brut équivalent au produit intérieur brut du continent africain tout entier.

Bien que l'Union Africaine ne considère pas la Diaspora africaine comme une nation, le Fonds monétaire international (FMI) reconnaît son importance économique. Le FMI estime que la Diaspora africaine constitue

maintenant le plus grand groupe d'investisseurs étrangers en Afrique.

Prenons Western Union par exemple. Ils estiment qu'il n'est pas rare qu'un immigré envoie 300€ par mois à sa famille restée en Afrique. Si vous supposez que la plupart des africains vivant hors d'Afrique envoient de l'argent chaque mois et que vous faites le calcul, vous admettrez comme le FMI que la Diaspora africaine est effectivement le plus grand investisseur étranger en Afrique.

Ce que peu réalisent c'est que les Africains qui immigreront aux Etats-Unis contribuent 40 fois plus à la richesse américaine qu'à l'économie africaine. Selon les Nations Unies, un professionnel africain travaillant aux Etats-Unis contribue pour environ 150 000\$ par an à l'économie des Etats-Unis.

De plus, si vous faites le calcul, vous vous rendrez compte que le professionnel africain qui envoie 300€ par mois en Afrique contribue 40 fois plus à l'économie des Etats-Unis qu'à l'économie africaine.

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Emeagwali at the Pan African Conference

Delivering the keynote speech
[Principia College (prin.edu), Elsayh,
Illinois, October 24, 2003]

Cela signifie qu'à chaque fois qu'un professionnel africain envoie 300€ en Afrique, ce dernier contribue pour 12 000€ à l'économie des Etats-Unis. Naturellement, une question plus importante que l'énumération de faits et de chiffres est l'élimination de la pauvreté en Afrique, pas simplement en la réduisant par des envois

d'argent au pays. L'argent seul ne peut pas éliminer la question de la pauvreté en Afrique, parce que même un million de dollars ne veut rien dire intrinsèquement.

La véritable richesse ne peut pas être mesurée en argent, pourtant nous

confondons souvent argent et richesse. Dans la situation actuelle, l'Afrique resterait pauvre même si nous devions y envoyer tout l'argent du monde.

Demandez à quelqu'un qui est malade ce que la "richesse" signifie, et vous aurez une réponse très différente de la plupart des personnes.

Si vous aviez le SIDA, vous donneriez volontiers un million de dollars pour ne plus l'être.

Quand vous donnez votre argent à votre docteur, ce médecin vous aide à changer votre argent en santé - ou

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plutôt, richesse. L'argent ne peut pas enseigner à vos enfants. Les enseignants le peuvent. L'argent ne peut pas vous apporter l'électricité. Les ingénieurs le peuvent. L'argent ne peut pas guérir les personnes malades. Les médecins le peuvent.

C'est parce que seul le capital humain d'une nation constitue une véritable richesse, que le capital humain vaut beaucoup plus que le capital financier.

Il y a quelques années, la Zambie avait 1 600 médecins. Aujourd'hui, la Zambie n'a seulement que 400 médecins. Le Kenya retient seulement 10% de ses infirmières et de ses médecins qualifiés. On raconte une histoire semblable d'Afrique du Sud jusqu'au Ghana.