

It's OK to love and hate Africa

Last week top Africans from South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda and Kenya attended the first Homecoming Revolution VIP think tank hosted at Norton Rose Fulbright offices in Johannesburg.



Ronak Gopaldas and Israel Noko

Says Angel Jones, CEO & founder of Homecoming Revolution, "We wanted to find the key themes that drive African diaspora aspirations. We're rolling out our South African best practice model to repatriate West and East Africans back to their respective homelands too, and we wanted to establish the do's and don'ts of our approach."

Overall the common reasons for Africans returning home are friends and family, lifestyle and a sense of belonging. This is consistent among many African nations.

Five key themes emerged from the discussion:

- The Duality of African Pride
- Inspiring Entrepreneurship
- Managing Homecomer's expectations
- Country Strengths & Weaknesses
- Recommendations for Homecoming Revolution

1. The Duality of Africanism

There's a fascinating duality of both love and hate that Africans have for their homeland.

"I hate the traffic and corruption in Kenya but love the people and the weather," says Mumbi Odame, a Kenyan at Nedbank. "But living abroad opens your eyes to what's possible. It gives you a lot of perspective and empathy, and actually makes you feel more patriotic to your homeland."



Pule Taukobong and Matsi Mbdise

"The important message to get out there is that it's perfectly normal to have mixed feelings," says Jones. "It's a tradeoff to return home, but the tradeoff is worth it."

Gone are the days when Africa should apologise for having problems - what country doesn't? There obviously needs to be a more balanced approach and a shift away from the "crime and poverty porn" so regularly dished out on global media. But at the same time Africans should have the confidence to own both the good and bad stories. A Proud African is someone who celebrates both the highs and the lows. It's not so black and white.

Toye Abioye, a Nigerian at Connemara Consulting comments, "On that note, I'm a bit concerned when we use the word, 'black' or 'white' to refer to ourselves, we need to change the lingo - we are African."

This authentic approach, of telling it like it is, is a fundamental strategic intent of Homecoming Revolution's activities.

"The beauty within African people is their realness", said Edwin Obiri, a Ghanaian at Africore Energy Empower.

2. Inspiring Entrepreneurship



Angel Jones and Edwin Obiri

With the phenomenal economic growth forecasts within sub-Saharan Africa there are plenty of African businesses seeking top diaspora talent. A homecomer brings back not only a wealth of global expertise, but also a true sense of purpose and willingness to make a difference. Homecoming Revolution's clients are showcasing careers across all sectors: financial services, engineering & construction, IT, management consulting, retail, travel & tourism, agriculture, law, media & marketing, education & healthcare.

But finding a job back home shouldn't be the sole ambition of a homecomer.

"As Africans we must stop positioning ourselves as job-seekers," says Abioye.

"Entrepreneurship needs to be positioned as a highly desirable goal," says Jones, "we need people to come home and create jobs."

Matsi Modise, a South African at SABEF & Africa 2.0 comments, "A major weakness within South Africa is the support given to entrepreneurs - from networks, to funding, to mentorship. We all need to play a part in changing that."

Pule Taukobong, a South African at African Angels Network says, "A major threat for Africa is the rest of the world taking the opportunities from us because we are not taking advantages. In the US there is support for entrepreneurs - 70% of the GDP is from SMMEs. Let's invest in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship will take this continent forward

Yet it's not so easy simply to come home and open a business. Apart from the red tape, there is also a gap between the homecomer's previous understanding of the local community and what it is today.

Therefore there are three ways that Homecoming Revolution will encourage entrepreneurship:

- **Franchising opportunities**

There are many franchising opportunities within the continent, where diaspora have the advantage of joining an established brand. With food and beverage being the fastest growing consumer segment on the continent (McKinsey report 2012) - there are opportunities to open a restaurant. Yet the idea of "owning a restaurant" is not necessarily held in high regard. This needs to change.

- **Bringing home best practice models**

A great quote on entrepreneurship is "ideas aren't something you have, they're something you do". And while there is a need for an innovative approach within SSA, there are also major opportunities for the basic supply of products and services.

The diaspora should be encouraged to identify great business models internationally and bring them home. What's more, they should find a partner on the ground who's entrenched in the community, and build a business together as a team.

○ **Angel investments**

The opportunity to own equity in a local business should be showcased to diaspora who are not ready to return home immediately. There are plenty of Angel investor groups offering opportunities in renewable energy, infrastructure, tourism, agriculture, IT and education.

Edwin Obiri, Africore Energy Empower and Workforce Solutions comments, "Angel investments on the ground creates a platform to connect locals with diaspora investors."

Abioye says "Nigeria is a cash economy, not credit. In 2010 there were \$5billion cash airline ticket sales alone. There is scope for social media, tech and IT opportunities to be implemented."

3. **Managing Homecomer's expectations**

The Diaspora must be cautioned against returning with a sense of arrogance, as if they've 'come home to rescue' the continent. Homecoming Revolution must be brutally honest about what to expect when you settle in back home.

"You'll never find the UK in Ghana," says Theodore Sutherland, a Ghanaian at Africa Careers Network "Stop aspiring to be like Europe or USA. Have patience and determination."

Manage expectations that things will not happen quickly. It takes hard work.

"Everyone wants quick results, but we don't want to put in the time" continues Sutherland.

Obiri says, "Play your part. When you look around London, and you see all the tall buildings, you must realise that they weren't just there. People built them, brick by brick. Building Africa will take all of us to build it brick by brick."

The settling-in phase is vital to manage, and virtual and physical networking events need to happen regularly. Heather O'Shea, a South African at Standard Bank Group says, "There needs to be an induction program for foreign spouse. This will make a big difference to whether people will remain in Africa, or go back abroad."

4. **Country strengths and weaknesses**

The common advantages of living abroad are: Exposure to new things, meeting new people, that sense of perspective and convenience.

The common advantages of returning are: Opportunities, that feeling of belonging, people know who you are, you can make a difference, spirit of entrepreneurship, sense of Ubuntu, family and friends, great career prospects, kids growing up in their own culture.

- Nigeria:
 - Strengths: Welcoming people, 60m people who need products and services, huge opportunities for business, vibrancy of the youth, Cash economy,
 - Weaknesses: Unnecessary complications, traffic, electricity, things take a long time, absence of social institutions, narrow thinking

- Ghana:
 - Strengths: The warmth of the people, very easy to network, visible growth, business opportunities, clean slate
 - Weaknesses: Relatively small economy, government involvement in business, lack of professionalism, consistent quality control

- Kenya:
 - Strengths: Large educated youth, high entrepreneurship, creative and innovative mindset, high disposable income, government cooperation with business
 - Weaknesses: Corruption, obsession with derisive politics

- Uganda:
 - Strengths: Highly educated population, double digit growth, weather, entrepreneurial spirit, tenacity of people, arable land
 - Weaknesses: High level of corruption in government, the notion of "chai" (bribery), sustainability of new business

- South Africa:
 - Strengths: Beauty, Ubuntuism, innovation, things work, untapped opportunities, phenomenal graduates, technology, soft landing point for sub-Saharan Africa

 - Weaknesses: Support for entrepreneurship, crime, gap between rich and poor, unemployment, early childhood education, govt efficiency, arrogance

5. Recommendations for Homecoming Revolution

Andy Duncan, a South African at Thoughtworks says, "I like what Homecoming Revolution is doing - bringing Africa home to solve African problems. On another note, beware South Africans referring to their continental brothers and sisters as the 'rest of Africa'."

"It's important to acknowledge the emotional reasons of why people left Uganda - there are often very painful stories. Highlighting the mixed emotions of what it means to come home is a very good way of going about it," says Monica Rubombora, a Ugandan at Accenture.

Edward Kittoo, a Ghanaian at Citibank says, "For me the most important consideration on returning to Ghana would be schools for my kids. I'm glad that Homecoming Revolution showcases schools and property as part of the offering."

Israel Noko, a South African at NPI Consulting says, "I'm delighted to see Homecoming Revolution rolling out its Africa wide platform. You must cater for French & Portuguese speaking countries too."

Says Heather O'Shea, a South African at Standard Bank Group: "Homecoming Revolution is great, it's a real movement - please don't let it become just another career fair. "

"Homecoming is playing a vital role, not just in bringing African skills home - but uniting Africans as a whole. It's a powerful platform that celebrates Africanism and positions Africanism as the highest aspiration," says Obiri.

Mumbi Odame comments, "This has been a real eye-opening event, it's so nice to hear insights about the commonalities within our countries. We should have more of these events, to encourage people to interact."

"Don't lose the momentum," comments Ronak Gopaldas, a South African at RMB, "And don't try to be everything to everyone. Africa's time is now, make or break. We need to bring together like-minded individuals. We need to mobilize people who have a sense of responsibility. Now is the time."

"When I'm older, I want to be able to tell my neighbour's child to go to the shops for me, without them asking why," continues Odame.

"You don't want to find yourself at 75 still living in New York - so why not come home now," concludes Abioye.

Every generation believes it will be different from the one before it. Show it, be the change you seek in Africa.

For more, go to www.homecomingrevolution.com/london-expo.

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