

# AFRICAN FOUNDATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

AFFORD@30

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

# introduction



©AFFORD

*"All I'm saying, as an African, I want to be a part in giving recognition to a place so people of Africa, African descent, can say, 'Look, wait a minute, we are not marginal to global development, we are important players to global development, and we want to be treated as equals, we want to treat you as equals...'"*

*Nicholas Atampugre, 4 May 2023*

This pamphlet reflects on the work of The African Foundation for Development (AFFORD) over the last 30 years and considers what this can tell us about how global development, civil society and the links between migration and development have changed. It has been produced through a collaboration between AFFORD and Northumbria University and is part of a wider project documenting diasporic engagement in global development since 1960s. Alongside this pamphlet, there

is an online archive of AFFORD's work, which includes a story-map of AFFORD's work and archival material from the last 30 years.

This is a selected history of AFFORD and their work, based on analysis of archival material and oral history interviews with key members of the organisation. The booklet starts by introducing the idea of 'diaspora,' its historical origins, and conceptual nuances, before briefly detailing the history of African diasporic communities in Britain. It then moves on to focusing on AFFORD, with chapter 2 detailing the meeting of minds which resulted in the development of the organisation. The next three chapters cover the key aspects of AFFORD's work over the last 30 years; firstly, shaping understandings of the links between migration and development; secondly, promoting 'jobs not aid' for development in Africa; and finally, enhancing the diasporic civil society ecosystem. The final chapter considers what we can learn from AFFORD's past work for the future of civil society in the migration-development space. Perhaps inevitably, the stories documented here veer towards the successes, the things that have changed and the

progress that has been made. Whilst not denying these, it is also important to consider the critiques, the 'failures' and the struggles. It is perhaps from the struggles that we learn the most. There is still much work to be done. In Britain and many countries around the world we are witnessing a growing hostility towards migration and 'push backs' against the idea of global development as something that is socially, morally, and ethically just. Continuing to challenge dominant narratives on migration and development is integral to a global future that heeds calls for reparative and social justice and acknowledges historical and contemporary connections between people and places, as AFFORD articulate:

*"[We hope for] a future in which the close links between the fate of Africans abroad and Africans in Africa are recognised and understood... AFFORD believes that the fate of Africans in the diaspora and Africans in Africa are inextricably bound together; it is this mutuality that justifies the efforts of Africans in the diaspora to work for Africa's development, even in the face of adversity in the diaspora."*

(AFFORD, 2014).

We would like to thank everyone who has helped with and taken part in the project:

Nicholas Atampugre

Iben Bø

Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie

Gibril Faal

Richard Leigh

Ndidi Njoku

Alache Ode

Stella Opoku-Owusu

Onyekachi Wambu

# Chapter 1: Context: Thinking with 'diaspora'

Uneven mobility and migration have been a longstanding facet of human life. Whilst contentious and contested the term 'diaspora' is increasingly being associated with groups of people who maintain diverse and fluid connections (financial, social, cultural, affective, or political) with their real or imagined 'homeland(s)' despite living (much of) their lives outside of it. Traditionally based on ideas of exile and dispersion, the term diaspora is derived from the ancient Greek meaning 'scattering.' The notion of 'diaspora' challenges the idea of a bounded nation-state and gives opportunity to consider how a nation-state (or region) could potentially be reconfigured by social and political connections outside its borders. Diaspora also stretches beyond connections to the 'host' and 'homeland,' including for example diasporic 'transregions' such as the Black Atlantic (Ashutosh, 2019). Diasporic engagement in social and political life in multiple locales is not new, with AFFORD themselves detailing:

*"Africans and people of African descent have a long history of settlement in the UK and a similarly long history of organising here for Africa's development.*

*Two examples from key moments in Africa's history illustrate the point. Freed slave, Olaudah Equiano (also known as Gustavus Vassa), was the first political leader of Britain's black community and a prominent anti-slavery activist who toured England, Scotland, and Ireland in the eighteenth century to campaign for abolition. In the 20th century, African activists' organisation of the fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945 was a landmark in the history of decolonisation. It sounded the death knell of British colonial rule in Africa and the British West Indies and set the clock ticking for the break-up of that part of the empire."*

*(AFFORD, 2001: 4)<sup>1</sup>.*

Diasporic communities, both historically and in contemporary life, can play significant roles in different forms of 'development' in multiple places. These


groups, however, must not be assumed to be homogenous, with tensions and complexities evident within and between diasporic groups. There is also recognition that diasporic engagement is shaped by (inter)generational changes and relationships, as memories, identities and feelings of belonging alter over time (Féron, 2023). It must also be acknowledged that, whilst this study considers the potentially progressive nature of development, there is also evidence of diaspora engagement furthering conflicts and inequalities (Koinova, 2018; Mullings, 2012).

Accompanied by many debates about 'who counts' as 'a diaspora' and with complex histories of movement, including enslavement, forced labour, conflict, economic and social marginalisation and persecution, globally, the African diasporic population is now estimated to number 350 million people.<sup>2</sup> Whilst diasporic communities engage in their 'homelands' in many ways, quantifiable financial remittances from the African diaspora to the continent are estimated at \$100billion/year.<sup>3</sup>

In Britain, whilst there is increasing recognition of the presence of people of African heritage for thousands of years (Adi, 2019), the story of post-war migration of people from countries of (and some imminently leaving) the British Empire tends to dominate the narrative. After 1945 many people migrated to

Britain from the Caribbean, South Asia, Africa, and the Pacific as citizens of the United Kingdom and her colonies, expecting to have the right to live and work in Britain. Patterns of mobility have varied since, with people moving to Britain from different parts of the African continent at different points in time. Zembe (2019), for example, details the migration of Black Zimbabweans to Britain in the 1980s and 1990s and Adi (2019:12) comments "the post-war history of black people in Britain has often focused on those of Caribbean origin, but by the dawn of the twenty-first century the largest percentage of the black population originated from the African continent." In the 2021 census 4% of people in England and Wales identified themselves as Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean, or African ethnicity.

As AFFORD, and others, articulate there are many challenges associated with living in the African diaspora in Britain. The insecurity, discrimination and marginalisation felt by racialised communities living in Britain envelops every aspect of daily life from educational opportunities to the workplace to social and healthcare system. Mohan (2008:472) comments in the context of diasporic remittances: "demands from family [ignore] the real hardship people have to endure in terms of low incomes, racism and general insecurity". These insecurities have not stopped diasporic communities coming together to organise



for better lives, with Steven (2019:144) detailing the “changing nature of African-centred organisations in Britain from 1975 – 2015”, which includes the influence of the 6th Pan-African Congress in 1974, the Anti-Racist Alliance, the Labour Party Black Sections and African spiritual beliefs and practices.

This booklet will now go on to trace the histories and legacies of one African-led civic organisation, AFFORD.



# Chapter 2: Becoming AFFORD: The continuation of history and contemporary civil society

*“Historically, the African diaspora has played significant roles in Africa’s “development” (as have other diasporas in their own regions of origin). Freed slave Olaudah Equiano and contemporaries were 18th century activists who campaigned tirelessly for abolition of slavery. Theirs was an emancipation agenda. Post-World War I Britain saw diasporas actively campaign for an end to colonial rule. The 1945 5th Pan-African Congress was a highlight. Their quest was for self-determination. Today, a far more diffuse range of issues confront Africa and the rest of the developing world but what remains constant is the diasporas effort*

*to emancipate their regions of origin from the bondages of poverty and social injustices and enable peoples from those regions to shape their own destinies.”*  
AFFORD, 2004<sup>4</sup>

AFFORD was conceptualised by its founder members, Nicholas Atampugre and Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie, as the continuation of longstanding histories of activism by members of the African diaspora centred around freedom from social injustices and recognition of the varying and multifaceted engagement diasporic communities had with the continent. These historical legacies, and the inspiration drawn from such activism,



were woven together with the founder members' own personal biographies, histories, and philosophies, as Nicholas Atampugre explains:

*"I have to start with my own history which is intertwined with AFFORD. I came to this country on 18th May 1984 as a political activist who had just spent one year in prison...but I'd come from a background of community work and also of student activism. I came to this country and my immediate reaction was to get into community work...Why is all of this relevant, because it all feeds into the article [in Africa World Review] that kick-started AFFORD...I attended a major conference in Paris...Now what that taught me was that Paris was different from London, the way migrant communities organised was different from here. But one of the things that led to that article was my juxtaposing what I saw was taking place...and saying to myself, "Wait a minute, Africans are doing a lot for themselves. They're doing a lot for themselves, and I'm part of it." I was also being proactive, we set up a journal called Africa World Review...I put my own frustrations into the article 'NGOs and the Cobweb of Politics, Money, and Development.' I chose that title with a particular intent in mind, basically it's an entirely messy business...When I wrote that article out of frustration, out of nowhere I got a letter from somebody. I wasn't expecting a letter, you know. It was addressed to me, I opened the*


*letter, and that was from the person who was then called Philip Ferguson, he subsequently changed his name to Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie, he said he found the article very interesting. I said, 'OK, why don't we meet up and have a conversation'."*

Nicholas Atampugre, 4 May 2023

The importance of Nicholas' article was reiterated by AFFORD co-founder Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie, who was already a member of a diaspora organisation focused on Sierra Leone:

*"...There was a magazine called the African World Review that I subscribed to and the headline on the front cover said 'NGOs – are they in the vanguard or recolonisation of Africa,' and in this edition was an article making the point about how ironic it was that you have all these NGOs which were UK based that said they were building capacity in Africa yet on their doorstep were many Africans also engaged in developing their countries of origin and never the twain did they meet. This really struck a chord with me and I wrote to the author, I found the author's contact and wrote, this is going back people don't write any more, I literally wrote this letter and printed it and I think posted it...he was Nicholas Atampugre..."*

Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie, 20 May 2023



This frustration and critique of the rapidly emerging global development industry, intertwined with Pan-African histories and philosophies were integral to the establishment of AFFORD. For AFFORD Pan-Africanism is both an inspiration and a way of working. It is a philosophical grounding that connects the global African diaspora both historically and geographically, stretching back to Olaudah Equiano and the Sons of Africa movement in the 1700s. The influence of Pan-Africanism has led AFFORD to be a “home to people – anybody that seems to identify themselves as Africans whether they be located on the continent or not. It doesn’t really matter, but it’s your consciousness of your identity as an African which is important.” (Nicholas Atampugre, 4 May 2023). AFFORD also differentiated itself from other forms of diasporic organising, for example hometown associations as current chair Ndidi Njoku reflects on:

*“I think the hometowns associations, for me how I saw them was they were mainly social with some development aspects. So, it would be about social gatherings, when we’re going to have the next party, and even though there is a community benefit from there, the main focus is not international development, that’s something they do on the side. So it would be as part of a party they would be providing funds to a particular project. For me, I very much wanted to contribute towards the economic development*

*within the continent. And AFFORD was an organisation that was diaspora led, first of all, structured extremely well with individuals that can engage me on an intellectual level and were focused on the development aspect. And how we can facilitate the diaspora to engage in development within the continent.”*

*Ndidi Njoku, 1st December 2023*

The beginnings of AFFORD also reflect the changing contexts of the global development landscape at the time, particularly the rise (and subsequent critique) of non-governmental organisations as development actors. NGOs gained momentum in the global development context in the 1960s and 1970s, with the idea of civil society coming to the fore in the early 1990s in response to liberal democratising and market liberalising reforms in the global South. NGOs and civil society organisations were seen as more participatory versions of development, representing marginalised voices, civil rights and localised interests as well as providing efficient and effective alternatives to the state in the turn towards market-led development. This increased prominence of civil society and the international NGO sector prompted much critique, as Nicholas articulated in his article for Africa World Review. The rise of civil society in Africa was also crucial to the formation of AFFORD, as Onyekachi Wambu reflects:

*“Suddenly there was this space that*

*opened up in the 1990s and a lot of people were trying to reconstitute their societies, there was freedom in South Africa, so there was just this kind of energy...which was partially about the comeback of civil society... I wanted to be part of that...I think the difference with AFFORD in the early 2000s was that there weren't many structures that allowed that participation to happen... AFFORD offered another way of doing what all of us, as Africans, were doing in our private lives and the motto of AFFORD I liked summed it up perfectly, which was about enhancing and expanding the contributions the diaspora made to development."*


*Onyekachi Wambu, 17 February 2023*

This rise can be understood alongside growing concerns about the efficiency and effectiveness of state-led development in Africa, with declining trust in the state as the primary agent of development. The growth of civil society, as arena full of potential but also a space of exclusion and marginalisation was crucial in the formation of AFFORD. The promotion of (I)NGOs as crucial development actors, that can both enhance processes of democratisation and produce alternative, more effective forms of development was being challenged, particularly for their Eurocentric biases, their paternalistic relations with donors, their disconnect from the supposed 'beneficiaries' of development and their depoliticisation. It was in this context that AFFORD

recognised the shortcomings of both state and (I)NGO-led development and aimed to carve a space for a different type of development actor. As the organisation developed more members were recruited, funding sought and staff employed. One of these members was Gibril Faal who would go on to be one of the chairs of AFFORD. Gibril encountered AFFORD through what he describes as his "bad sense of direction" (Gibril Faal, 23 May 2023). After unintentionally finding himself in an AFFORD meeting Gibril was struck by the potential of AFFORD's thinking, if less impressed by other aspects of the discussion:

*"I was amazed by the poverty of ambition amongst the people gathering there... Remember how powerful I thought this was as an idea and how disappointed I was as to the minor things they were arguing about...By the Saturday evening, Chux, as we call him, Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie, at the time I knew him as Philip Ferguson, he was at my flat in Streatham and we were having a discussion and he was saying to me, 'Some of the stuff you think we can do, why don't you help us do it?' And that's when I started engaging with AFFORD, working with them. The first set of stuff I did was to help them bring some structure. I think the first strategy document was developed...They had small funding and I managed their recruitment the first time they formally recruited staff..."*

*Gibril Faal, 23 May 2023*



AFFORD began to grow and develop in many ways: strategically, in membership and in financial terms. This period also witnessed considerable changes in the way in which the connections between migration and development were being thought about. These changes and AFFORD's part in these re-conceptualisations will be considered in the next chapter.



# Chapter 3: Paradigms & policie

## Situating AFFORD in a changing migration-development nexus

*"I think the difference between when I joined AFFORD and where we are now is the idea of diaspora and development, migration, and development, is now accepted in international discourse and also in funding and in policy spaces from the UN downwards. We have seen a monumental shift so that those things that we were doing privately are now part of the policymaking process and have been incorporated into the SDGs."*  
Onyekachi Wambu, 17 February 2023

The rise of AFFORD has both witnessed and been part of major shifts in understandings of the migration-development nexus. Moving from ideas of brain-drain to the potential of migration (and 'migrants') to contribute to countries and regions of heritage, AFFORD was part of this new approach, challenging existing discourses about the roles and potential of diasporic communities in the global development

context. Gibril Faal, a former chair of AFFORD, reflects on this paradigm shift in the migration-development nexus:

*"There's a phrase that used to be overused, and that is paradigm shift. In my view, in my experience, the nearest I've ever seen a paradigm shift in my life is the work of AFFORD, in that before AFFORD and after AFFORD, you can see two different landscapes...But AFFORD's role was to absolutely show the nexus, the undeniable strong nexus between migrants, diaspora and the development of their countries of origin or heritage. Now, that's not totally new because in this world there are few things that are totally new...But in terms of global development discourses...this was the first time [it was] brought here..."*

Gibril Faal, 23 May 2023

## *Increasing the visibility, legitimacy, and acceptance of diaspora organisations*

AFFORD knew from personal experience that African organisations had an important role to play in development (AFFORD, 2012)<sup>5</sup> and documenting the existence and roles of diaspora organisations and making their contributions (more) visible became part of AFFORD's early work, with key concerns including "[the] role Africans in the UK diaspora can and should play in Africa's development and the marginalisation of Africans from the mainstream of development processes" (AFFORD, 1997)<sup>6</sup>.

Increasing public discourse about Africa's development, the damage of structural adjustment programmes, conflicts around the continent and increasing emphasis on the voluntary sector and NGOs to enact development sat paradoxically with an experiential sense that African-led organisations were often marginalised and excluded from global development spaces in Britain. AFFORD wanted to challenge the paradox of this marginalisation. An early project was a 'Survey of African organisations in London' (1997). The survey outlines the scope of African-led organisations in the development field and crucially articulates an alternative sense of what development could mean:

*"The organisations surveyed perceived one of their strengths to be an awareness or first-hand knowledge of the problems encountered in development work in Africa and an ability to arrive at more appropriate solutions than western NGOs. Doubtless the argument has considerable merits, particularly when we think of those western NGOs that do not work with local partners in Africa. Also, when we think of development not as a series of projects with start and end points, but as an ongoing process of positive, human-centred and directed social change, along with associated institutional development, then the benefits of having Africans as deeply involved and immersed as possible in that process appear more evident."*

(AFFORD, 1998:16).<sup>7</sup>

The report also directly challenges the existing discourse on African NGOs in the development space:

*"We argue that African organisations bring to the table far more than a demand for money. In addition to their skills, knowledge, understanding and long-term commitment to African development, they also bring the involvement and interest of members of their respective communities."*

(AFFORD, 1998:17).

AFFORD then played a role in aiding conceptualisations of diasporic engagement in development, particularly

thinking on the different typologies of engagement (in, through and by) and on the multiple forms of diasporic capital that may contribute to development (see Mohan & Williams, 2002; van Hear et al., 2004). Pushing for the acceptance of the work of African-led organisations in the global development context was integral to AFFORD's work, as Gibril Faal explains:

*"AFFORD then purposefully, part of their strategic approach was to focus some time on explaining and trying to get understanding of the concept and then acceptance. Understanding of how the diaspora contributes and, for some, that wasn't enough. They can understand it, but they can't handle it, because it threatens everything else they know. Then there was this next phase of accepting it. And during that time, AFFORD was also trying to pilot into practice actual projects that demonstrate that nexus. Part of the way acceptance was won was to explain and to engage with these, we used to call them mainstream partners."*

*Gibril Faal, 23 May 2023*

Current chair Ndidi Njoku reflects on AFFORD's influence in the sector, and its influence on other diaspora organisations:

*"Now you hear of everybody talking about the diaspora and they know about it. When we started, we were the pioneers of getting diaspora onto the lips of the government and everything*

*else, and it was a hard slog. And it was a hard slog, but we have been successful because we can see the plethora of different organisations, different institutions celebrating the diaspora and the contributions of the diaspora."*

*Ndidi Njoku, 1st December 2023*

This is echoed in a more personal way by Nicholas Atampugre, one of the founders of AFFORD:

*"You know personally it's a dream. It's a dream for the day, the year, and the place where the people of Africa, African descent, can walk tall among the community of peoples of the world, as equal partners making equal contributions for the growth and development of humanity...All I'm saying, as an African, I want to be a part in giving recognition to a place so people of Africa, African descent, say, 'Look, wait a minute, we are not marginal to global development, we are important players to global development, and we want be treated as equals, we want to treat you as equals...'"*

*Nicholas Atampugre, 4 May 2023*

## *Shaping policy*

Raising the visibility, legitimacy, and acceptance of diaspora organisations as development actors extended into the policy spaces of global development. AFFORD worked to shape understandings



and policies at various scales that encouraged global development institutions to recognise, accept and work with diasporic organisations. Of particular significance was AFFORD's engagement with state-based development actors, such as Britain's Department for International Development (DfID) and other non-African NGOs and INGOs, such as Comic Relief, pushing them to re-conceptualise how they understood and operationalised the relationship between migration and development. Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie reflects on his engagement with DfID:

*"DfID was formed in 1997 when New Labour won power. Clare Short became the Secretary of State for International Development. The first White paper had a very curious phrase in it that I would have missed had it not been for a friend who at the time worked at VSO, an English chap, I can't remember his name, but a very good friend and he contacted me and said 'Hey, it's kind of interesting, have you looked at page blah blah of the white paper because there's thing about DfID committing to working with,' and the exact phrase escapes me now, but it was something like they're going to work with ethnic minorities in the UK to support development in their countries of origin...*

*So that became a hook for us to say we welcome this and we leveraged that quite a bit. But in January of 1999*

*there was a conference in Birmingham on International Development...so I put my hand up in the Q&A and said, 'Well you know you have this commitment in the white paper, to work with ethnic minorities to support their countries of origin, please can you tell us what the plan is what progress has been made?' And Clare Short then said: 'Well, from her experience there was evidence that ethnic minorities are even less interested in supporting development in their countries of origin than say white Brits are, for example.' Which was interesting and of course didn't accord with our experience, so subsequently, and I can't remember what happened but I'm pretty sure some of the handlers came out and talked to me after anyway. At some stage they arranged a meeting and I had a meeting with Clare Short in her office, and what basically was going on within DfID was having made this commitment in the White paper, it may be out of the real commitment or interest, they were thinking how to address this. DfID then was beginning to entirely conceptualise the relationship between migration and development..."*

*Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie, 20 May 2023*

Part of AFFORD's work was to encourage links between diasporic organisations and 'mainstream/INGOs,' beginning with research which tried to understand the disconnect between different organisations and the marginalisation of people of African heritage from the wider

development landscape:

*“UK-based INGOs have to date failed to engage with, or even recognise, the important stakeholders of their work in Africa within the African diaspora that live right here in Britain on their doorstep. AFFORD’s Dialogue for Development report explored a number of reasons for this oversight. Some INGOs have begun searching for ways to address this issue. However, the issue is a complex one. INGOs are not structured to engage effectively with stakeholders such as Africans living in the UK. The idea of being accountable to these stakeholders is new to them and some find it threatening. Few organisations are completely clear about the benefits to them of engaging with Africans in the UK. For some INGOs, awareness of a need for change is being driven more by comments and policies emerging from the Department for International Development (DfID), that for many organisations is one of their major donors and de facto regulators.”*

*(AFFORD, 2014:9).*

Participation in the Global Forum for Migration & Development (GFMD), which began in 2006, was also seen as another key policy interface through which to shape the debate about the links between migration and development as Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie explains:

*“The Global Forum on Migration and*

*Development was established as a voluntary intergovernmental body that met, so they didn’t have any formal status as an established entity, but there was a demand both from the receiving countries particularly in the north and the sending countries that were typically from the south. The first one was in 2007, because of by then the visibility that AFFORD had, I participated in that first one...We were part of that international discourse and some of those individuals such as Gibril became very prominent in that as well subsequently and chaired a number of the meetings and really was very pivotal. So that was another, in terms of the interface if you like between AFFORD and policy mainstream, that was another part of it.”*

*Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie, 20 May 2023*

AFFORD continues to be involved in shaping the policy arena for example through pieces of evidence to a parliamentary inquiry on Nigeria and to the House of Lords International Relations and Defence committee about the sustained opening of money transfer companies during the Covid19 pandemic.<sup>9</sup> AFFORD’s engagement with the government goes beyond the submission evidence to involvement on All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs), with the aim of having a presence in parliament to influence policy. This began with the Diaspora, Development and Migration APPG, formed in 2014. The purpose of the group was to: *“promote parliamentary*

*and public understanding of the key issues affecting diaspora communities in the UK, and to expand and enhance their contributions to the international development agenda” (AFFORD, 2014).<sup>10</sup>*

Following this AFFORD is now part of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Afrikan Reparations which was registered in November 2021. Whilst there are myriad difficulties in tracing the attribution and causality of policy changes AFFORD’s impact in the policy space should not be underestimated according to former board member Alache Ode. Here Alache shares her perspective that AFFORD’s work also contributed to the development of diaspora strategies by governments in Africa:

*“Before AFFORD there weren’t a lot of regards for organisations that were focusing on policy side of things. I mean they did, but it was – how can I put it? You had groups that were focusing on maybe policies around Black people, policies that were within the UK. But in terms of looking at foreign policies or looking at policies that straddle Africa, the world, and the UK. So, having that influence... AFFORD has had a lot of impact. When you look at the Commission for Africa, under Tony Blair, when you look at the African Union itself. In terms of looking at development agenda within the African Union, looking at the diaspora and development... When you look across a lot of the African countries that have the diaspora*

*departments, diaspora agencies, it came from a lot of the work that AFFORD had done.”*

*Alache Ode, 26 May 2023*

Challenging the marginalisation and exclusion of diasporic organisations from the dominant global development landscape is not only about moral and ethical inclusivity, but also as AFFORD and other organisations believe, about ‘doing development better.’ How AFFORD have disrupted dominant narratives of development is the focus of chapter 4.



# Chapter 4: Projects & programmes

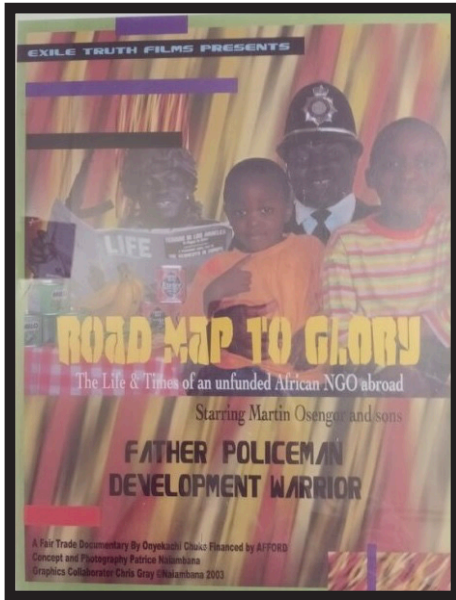
## Ideas of development (in Africa): jobs not aid.

From its inception AFFORD questioned what development could mean and could be. Notes from a reflective meeting in 1997 suggest debate amongst members of AFFORD about their vision for development, and how the organisation connected the development work they wish to do in the present with diasporic struggles in the past:

*“Development is a difficult concept to define...perhaps we could start by attempting to place development in its historical context. Africans have always had prime responsibility for shaping their own destiny...So AFFORD’s main interest is in helping to build the sort of institutions that people can use to effectively advance their own interests in developmental terms...Again, thinking historically, we know that Africans away from the continent-in the diaspora-have*

*long played important parts in African affairs and that is a tradition we wish to continue, in the best spirit of that tradition...Thus for AFFORD, Africans in the diaspora are very much part of Africa’s development and should play a more central role...So, in sum, for AFFORD, development is a people-centred, holistic process that involves people talking together, working together to make the choices that best suit their interests taking into account the diverse and legitimate views that exist”*  
(AFFORD, 1997:4)<sup>11</sup>.

## Perceptions of Africa



©AFFORD, Aiding and Abetting project, 2003

Disrupting dominant ideas of Africa and how the continent is perceived in Britain is key to AFFORD's work, connecting these perceptions to how development is enacted and the positioning of the diasporic communities in Britain:

*"Part of the problem is that young Africans growing up in Britain live in an environment that essentially denigrates virtually anything to do with Africa: In the media every day, in the racism on the streets, in the schools, everywhere. Little wonder, then, that young people often feel ashamed, or at best indifferent, about being African."*

(AFFORD, 2003:32).

The Arts Council funded Aiding and Abetting - Local Image, Global damage' Programme (2002 – 2003) aimed to counter Africa's negative image in the media, and particularly in development discourse. The importance of challenging dominant perceptions of Africa is articulated in a 2003 report entitled 'What can the African diaspora do to challenge distorted media perceptions about Africa?'. The conclusion of this report states:

*"Africa seems to occupy a unique place in the British people's perception of the developing world, itself generally perceived in negative, distorted, and demeaning ways. The African diaspora has a key role (indeed responsibility) to play in helping to transform how Africa is presented in the media and perceived by the British public (including young people of African origin)...African diaspora organisations will need to take this challenge seriously and make the response a central element of their overall strategy. They will need to develop their capacity to understand the mechanics of the media and to be proactive in mounting responses. But as major stakeholders in Africa's progress and as members of an invisible welfare state, they have exciting, even breathtaking stories to tell."*

(AFFORD, 2003: 27)<sup>12</sup>.

This continued engagement with media perceptions of Africa was evident in the Africans without Borders Programme with Birkbeck University, which culminated in The Africa Rising conference at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London in 2014 (funded by the Arts Council) 2013. This event brought together a variety of actors and institutions that shape the images of Africa we see today. This included corporate actors, African private sector broadcasters, British media, and the NGO sector.

AFFORD have tried to shape perceptions of Africa to a place of investment and enterprise opportunities, of somewhere exciting and full of potential.

## Jobs and investment, not aid.



©AFFORD, *The AFFORD Business Club*, 2011

As well as hoping to project a new geographical imaginary of Africa within the world, AFFORD's work has challenged

and unsettled what development can mean, particularly through the narrative of 'jobs not aid.' AFFORD's emphasis on jobs has in part been driven by their placing of the voices of those in Africa and of African descent at the centre of discussions about the meaning of development. This approach was not without its challenges as Onyekachi Wambu, former executive director of AFFORD reflects:

*"During that whole process we looked at polling that had been carried out in Africa about the key issues that Africans were concerned about. The top one was jobs and employment. We then looked at the development industry, and it was not a priority here at all, sometimes it was not even in the top ten. We thought how is it possible that this whole industry is supposed to be responding to people's priorities and their most acute needs, which they have reflected in poll after poll, yet these are not responded to?"*

*We then developed our intervention around those priorities, around how do we create jobs - given that that was the key consideration - and then we began a focused campaign to put jobs on the agenda..."*

Onyekachi Wambu, 17 February 2023

AFFORD wanted to "embed themselves in Africa, which led to AFFORD conceptualising what work in Africa would look like" (AFFORD, 2011:5)<sup>13</sup>. This was deliberately shifting the geographies

of how development is conceptualised – not about being in Britain, but rather about trying to imagine oneself in Africa. This desire to embed themselves in Africa prioritised the development of AFFORD’s job creation agenda, with the emphasis AFFORD placed on ‘decent jobs’ (notably prior to this being very visible on the global agenda through the SDGs) and on the development of business and enterprise in Africa, seen as a way of ‘rooting itself IN Africa’ (AFFORD, 2007:3)<sup>14</sup>. This focus on ‘decent jobs’ came as result of the Hello Africa Programme (2001 – 2003), which concentrated on trying to find out what the need and priorities of local people were and how to partner with African organisations around those priorities. Jobs and employment emerged as a priority and an agenda around job creation and supporting small and medium sized enterprises was developed, with SMEs understood as the biggest single generators of jobs in Africa. Supporting SMEs for job creation then became a key part of AFFORD’s theory of change. After years of consideration, this programmatic focus was launched at AFFORD’s African Diaspora and Development Day (AD3) ‘Enterprise Africa’ conference in 2005. AFFORD’s emphasis on job creation dovetailed with the wider ‘8 million jobs for Africa’ discourse, with the AD3 conference in 2006 focusing more intensely on job creation, aiming ‘to place the issue of jobs in Africa as a central plank of the fight

against poverty firmly on the agenda’ and to focus on ‘hand ups instead of hand-outs’ (AFFORD, 2007:4).

*“We were real evangelists for the jobs. We started to talk about the jobs needed at that point for the 8 million young Africans coming onto the job market every year in Africa south of the Sahara... The challenges were how do we create the jobs for them as part of an effective and focused strategy for poverty reduction?”*

*Onyekachi Wambu, 17 February 2023*



©AFFORD, Africa Gives poster

AFFORD recognised that diaspora attention to this agenda went far beyond financial remittances, articulating the importance of intellectual, political, cultural, and social capital and time

volunteered. Conceptualising diasporic engagement through these varied forms of capital enabled AFFORD to develop their SEEDA programme in 2006. Working in partnership with VSO, the SEEDA programme emphasised job creation, looking to use 'resource people' from the diaspora community to build businesses, social enterprises and 'decent jobs' in Africa: *"SEEDA harnesses the resources of the African diaspora alongside domestic resources by providing skills, knowledge, investment opportunities to spur enterprise development for Micro, Small and Medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs)."*

(AFFORD, 2008:2)<sup>15</sup>. Resource people undertook one-to-one business coaching, groups business skills training, networking to support business development and advocacy activities in Ghana and Sierra Leone. Aiming to *"develop new thinking and approaches to enhancing the practice of diaspora volunteering"* (AFFORD, 2008:7), SEEDA was positioned as being both beneficial to entrepreneurs in Africa and to the diaspora resource persons who gained leadership skills, a better understanding of business opportunities in Africa and a sense of empowerment. SEEDA provided a way for Africans in the diaspora to connect with the continent:

*"RPs [Resource Persons] have generally shown themselves to be people who want to 'give back' and are happy to have found a programme that enables them to contribute so meaningfully. The*

*programme also enables the RPs to gain an understanding of a country that is new to them or that they have been away from for a long time. Connections are made, ideas of how to stay involved are born and experiences that are invaluable and create personal growth are developed."*

(AFFORD, 2011:6).

AFFORD's current chair Ndidi Njoku was one of the first resource people recruited by AFFORD. In our conversation she reflected on this experience:

*"...When AFFORD launched its first diaspora volunteering programme, I was part of it and I went to, Sierra Leone was the first one I went to. And it was interesting engaging with entrepreneurs, and at the end of it, I remember I had a discussion with one other – we were called resource people at that time – resource person, and Chux, and what I found fascinating about Chux is whenever I gave him an idea, he took it, ran with it and implemented it. For me, it made AFFORD not just a talking shop, there was action that is happening as a result of it."*

Ndidi Njoku, 1st December 2023

Ndidi details her experiences of being part of the SEEDA programme, including working with local businesses in Sierra Leone to improve their financial literacy and engaging with banks to improve the traders' access to formalised



financial services. She comments on how AFFORD's work and relationships appeared to differ from the wider development sector:

*"And this is a thing that AFFORD did.*

*Another reason why I'm attracted to AFFORD, and it was one of the feedbacks that I personally received, and it was from an individual who said to me during, I think it was either this trip or one of the other trips that I went to as a resource person for AFFORD, is they said, "You came back for us. Typically when it's an NGO coming, they don't look like us. They don't speak like us, and sometimes they speak down to us. But you're speaking to us on our level. You see us and we see you." I said, "Yes, and not only that, we came with the perception that we're going to impart some knowledge from you."*

*But what we also did is we learnt from them. We learnt different ways in which they do things that we don't do over here that we can incorporate within our lives.*

*We learnt about community and how community worked. It has informed my perspective of how things work within the context of a developing company or within a village type community."*

*Ndidi Njoku, 1st December 2023*

Members of the SEEDA project were crucial to establishing the AFFORD Sierra Leone office, beginning the transition of AFFORD into a multi-sited organisation, as Ndidi Njoku comments:

*"...I didn't want AFFORD to be like those institutions and government agencies and just leave. I said that what we need to do is to sustain the work that we had done, and that's how we then created AFFORD*

*Sierra Leone with the capacity of supporting entrepreneurs on the ground. So, for me, that had been one of those successes but that had also, you know, there were lessons learnt with regards to AFFORD Sierra Leone, and we have used that in establishing different AFFORD offices across Nigeria now, Ghana and Belgium."*

*Ndidi Njoku, 1st December 2023*



©AFFORD, SEEDA programme Sierra Leone training sessions, 2006

This emphasis on jobs and business as a primary mode of development can also be seen in the AFFORD Business Club (ABC). The ABC Sierra Leone project started in October 2011 with "with three main aims: the creation of 350 new jobs; increased business growth; and the attraction of £1million of foreign and diaspora investment into Sierra Leone by

September 2016” (AFFORD, 2017:3)<sup>16</sup>. AFFORD also developed ABC UK, offering mentoring, business advice and incubation support, exemplifying their belief that the support and development of businesses in and by the diaspora will facilitate development in Africa (and the diaspora). Alache Ode reflects on the job creation agenda:

*“I think when people had been looking at development and engaging with development in – particularly in Africa... they had always been looking at it from a charity perspective...But from AFFORD’s perspective it was, ‘Look, it’s not about charity, it’s about you engaging with what you need to do.’ So, rather than going and supporting water projects and so on, AFFORD decided also at that time to champion job creation... But in terms of that job creation AFFORD was quite a forward-thinking organisation and one of the leaders of that agenda”*

*Alache Ode, 26 May 2023*

## Enhancing the impact of remittances

©AFFORD, Remitplus poster

Part of the increasing attention to the migration-development nexus has been the potential offered by remittances to shape development outcomes. With remittances garnering significant and increasing attention from the development community AFFORD’s RemitAid initiative looked to reduce the negatives of remittances and accentuate the positives, through for example tax rebates on remittances. Remittances are seen by AFFORD as: *“particularly important for sustainable development because it entails self-help by people who originated from developing countries.”* (AFFORD, 2005:1)<sup>17</sup>. AFFORD then sees remittances as crucial to development

and something that can be maximised and enhanced through engaging with the overarching remittance economy and ecosystem. Gibril Faal describes the origins of RemitAid:

*“I’d been involved in regeneration work in the UK from the 1990s onwards and especially the use of financial instruments and economic planning to regenerate deprived areas. And that’s when the idea of Remit-Aid first came to me. At the time, in the UK we had what was called the index of multiple deprivation...And, of course, all of this is post-devastation of former mining towns by the closures of the mines where, effectively, over a short period unemployment had jumped to astronomical numbers. And what do you do? Amongst the stuff that came was what was called the Enterprise Investment Scheme. As an instrument, if you invest in a deprived area, then that investment would benefit from a tax relief, thereby encouraging people to invest in those deprived areas or in priority sectors. Around the same time, as well, the gift aid model was picking up very fast ...And another big element it brought was the recognition of remittances as a form of development finance...So bringing these two powerful strands of remittances as development finance and the use of macroeconomic policy and taxation to incentivise, that’s how the Remit-Aid idea came about.*

*And now, as you know, it evolved from just being a tax relief to actually it can just be a match funding.”*

*Gibril Faal, 23 May 2023*

Disrupting dominant perceptions of Africa, what development can mean in Africa and who can be part of the development landscape has then been crucial to AFFORD’s work, as Onyekachi Wambu reflects:

*“I think we have been a disruptor. I think that is the big thing, and disrupting in a sense that we have reached an understanding of how development happens, or doesn’t happen, and actors and stakeholders who are involved in that. When Chux and Nicholas first started and they went to various meetings and talked about the diaspora and development people just laughed and said, “What are you talking about? Diasporas don’t do development,” because development was defined as a very narrow, technical thing and it was what NGOs and governments in the West did through ODA and other assistance. We instead talked about remittances and some of the other impacts that diaspora actors were making in that space...”*

*Onyekachi Wambu, 17 February 2023*

# Chapter 5: People & partnerships

## Expanding civil society in and for global development

One longstanding aspect of AFFORD's work has been to nurture 'diasporic civil society ecosystems,' by which we mean supporting specific diasporic civil society organisations and creating and being part of wider networks of diasporic civic organisations, with these networks often spanning transnational borders. Alongside this organisational support AFFORD has also worked to provide a space for people of African heritage living in the UK to be part of the global development industry and provided pathways for people of African heritage into the global development industry. The context for building the diasporic civil society ecosystem in the development landscape is crucial. As we have seen, prior to the late 1990s and early 2000s, diasporic actors, organisations and voices tended to be excluded and marginalised in the British (and wider) development sphere, with AFFORD questioning both the exclusion of diasporic perspectives,

the engagement of the development industry in Africa and the relationships between Africans in the diaspora and those 'at home':

*"We look forward to a future in which the close links between the fate of Africans abroad and Africans in Africa are recognised and understood. We envision a future in which the communication, understanding and trust between Africans at home and abroad are such that all Africans envisage themselves as part of an integrated process of human development."*  
(AFFORD, 2014:3)<sup>18</sup>.

In practical terms, AFFORD's understanding of development means that success for the organisation comes from bringing more people of African descent into the development process, to work as equal partners with Africans on the continent to shape the process, to be part of the decision-making process, to

make informed choices, and to channel more resources to build a better Africa.” (AFFORD, 1997:4).

AFFORD’s desire to bring more people of African heritage into development processes can be viewed as operationalised through three (interlinked) scales: firstly, through creating opportunities for people of African heritage, secondly, by strengthening organisations and finally, through network facilitation.

## *Spaces and pathways for people of African heritage*



©AFFORD, AD3

AFFORD’s existence as an organisation has provided a space for people of African heritage to work in the global development industry in a way which foregrounds a sense of belonging and inclusion. Led by Pan-African approaches, AFFORD views the development of Africans wherever they may live as bound together, aiming to create geographically expansive civic spaces through which

people of Africans descent are connected. AFFORD has sought to provide a space which speaks to the history of diasporic Africans, the duality of life in the diaspora and the connections between diasporic struggles and those on the African continent, as detailed in their mission statement:

*“AFFORD envisions a future in which Africans themselves are in control of their own destiny. We look forward to a future in which the alleged “beneficiaries” of development efforts –ordinary Africans – really do benefit from development efforts that they control and own, that are accountable and that are firmly rooted in African communities...The people who formed AFFORD and those who have joined subsequently believe in the ability of Africans to define and solve their own problems and to chart a way forwards for themselves. Key to this becoming a reality is the belief that Africans – in Africa and the diaspora – share common interests and experiences and need to work together on the basis of common principles and a shared vision of the future to achieve their goals. AFFORD believes that the fate of Africans in the diaspora and Africans in Africa are inextricably bound together; it is this mutuality that justifies the efforts of Africans in the diaspora to work for Africa’s development, even in the face of adversity in the diaspora.”*

(AFFORD, 2014:3).

This sense of AFFORD as a safe space and a space of refuge is also commented on Onyekachi Wambu:

*“AFFORD was a structured place and space outside of the family where you could meet other people to begin to talk seriously about African development. It was also this exciting space that people who came into found that they could have ideas and try them out. It offered safety but also because of the safety you could dream, if I could put it like that, and you had the support to be able to dream and think, ‘OK, we do have problems in Africa but perhaps a group of us can make a difference if we’re united and properly organised’” .*

Onyekachi Wambu, 17 February 2023

The desire to engage people of African heritage in global development has been operationalised through multiple programmes, including africa21 and the AD3 conferences. Held annually, and more recently at Chatham House in London, AFFORD’s African Diaspora and Development Days (AD3) have provided opportunities to discuss key concerns related to migration and development and discuss the roles diasporic communities can play in development. With opportunities to meet and discuss, AD3s have also provided opportunities for participants to come together and enhance diasporic engagement in Africa’s development.



©AFFORD, AD3 2012

Recognising the exclusion of people of African descent from the global development industry, AFFORD offered a route into the development sector through its internship programme and worked to produce a more inclusive spaces within the mainstream global development landscapes, as Alache Ode and Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie explain:

*“I remember there were many, many, many people who were young, coming out of university, passionate, but for whom the development industry was by and large unwelcoming. It just, it wasn’t necessarily deliberate, but it created more barriers. And so, AFFORD was one of the vehicles for that, again not that we, it wasn’t intentional, we weren’t aware of it, but they would be realised by young people starting to come here...And so AFFORD has been that engine...”*

Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie, 20 May 2023

*“I think AFFORD meant quite a lot to me because I was working in the international development sector. And a lot of the mainstream agenda, those of us who*

*were in it, our voices weren't being heard.*

*[We] were amplified by AFFORD and [that] created a lot of changes."*

*Alache Ode, 26 May 2023*

*"AFFORD has been the vehicle through which I've been able to discover myself, become myself, realise myself and my potential, my passion, my commitment and do so in a way... AFFORD in particular is the embodiment of my journey, my experience, it was a space that was a very creative space..."*

*Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie, 20 May 2023*

## Supporting diaspora organisations

Members of AFFORD knew that African organisations had an important role to play in development. This desire to support diasporic organisations as development actors recognises the inequalities embedded within the development industry, with diasporic organisations neglected and undervalued as development actors, and marginalised within the institutional landscape of the global development industry. It also acknowledges the 'unique' values of diasporic organisations within the development landscape, and the potential they have to produce different understandings of development relative to dominant development discourses. In supporting diaspora organisations, AFFORD has often focused on

capacity building, recognising the dual challenges these organisations can face, commenting: *"Rather, the challenge is to strengthen these organisations' "double vision," in other words, their ability to tackle the problems they face where they are whilst simultaneously addressing problems in Africa."* (AFFORD, 2014:4).

AFFORD has also acted as a grant-making organisation, with Chief Executive Onyekachi Wambu commenting on how AFFORD's relationship with Comic Relief developed:

*"In those early days the biggest bit of advocacy was engaging with Comic Relief... Chux met with Richard Graham, then Head of International Grants, and said to him: "You're missing a trick," and Richard was initially puzzled about who these diaspora actors were but to his credit, he went away and did some research and was interested enough in diaspora potential for Comic Relief to begin directing money towards diaspora run programmes. To date, as a result of the intervention, they have given out, I'm told along with DfID (FCDO), over £100 million to diaspora organisations, so we can be especially proud of that."*

*Onyekachi Wambu, 17 February 2023*

## Being part of diasporic civil society networks

As diasporic communities gained greater visibility and legitimacy within the global development sector, AFFORD has been part of efforts to shape the civil society ecosystem around migration and development, looking to develop and enhance the role (diasporic) civil society groups can play in the migration-development nexus. Of particular note is the role AFFORD has played in various civil society networks centred around the migration-development nexus, for example MADE: The migration and development civil society network evolved out of years of GFMD organising and was launched in 2014, benefitting from initial co-funding from the European Union for three years.

AFFORD were also an implementer and secretariat of the ADEPT network, which aimed to assist African diaspora development organisations across the EU (plus Norway and Switzerland) to optimise their development engagement in Africa, professionalise their organisations and activities, create effective partnerships in Europe and Africa, expand and improve their development activities in Africa and influence the policy and practice of development cooperation (AFFORD, 2016:2)<sup>19</sup>. The ADEPT network therefore looked to shape the European diasporic civil society ecosystem through shaping the organisations that were part of

that ecosystem. ADEPT was initially funded through the European Union's International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and implemented by a group of diaspora organisations. In a critical phase in its development, AFFORD as the secretariat, midwifed ADEPT becoming an independent organisation in 2017.

Focusing on diasporic humanitarianism, AFFORD was one of three founders of the DEMAC project, which provided an opportunity to both highlight the role played by diasporic civil society as well as strengthen the capacity of diasporic civil society, particularly in relation to humanitarian emergencies.

*"The DEMAC project (where AFFORD worked the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Berghof Institute) was an ambitious and wide-ranging exercise focusing on Sierra Leonean, Somali and Syrian diaspora-based relief organisations and initiatives based in the UK, Denmark, and Germany. It was implemented over nineteen months to improve diaspora emergency response, capacity and coordination with the 'formal' humanitarian system, with the ultimate aim to improve conditions for people of concern in humanitarian crises"*

(AFFORD, 2016a:2)<sup>20</sup>.

Initially funded by ECHO (the humanitarian arm of the European Union) and now by USAID, DEMAC continues today and, whilst AFFORD is no



longer part of the initiative, it remains a global network of diaspora organisations, facilitated by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC).

The diasporic civil society ecosystem in the global development context has diversified and expanded over the last 30 years, with AFFORD's desire to bring more people of African heritage into development processes occurring, as we have seen, through their engagement with a variety of civic spaces and networks in Europe and in Africa. This has aimed to build relations between businesses, volunteers, academia, development institutions and CSOs and the formation of these networks has allowed diaspora groups from across Europe to come together to discuss the critical development concerns, build their capacity to contribute to development and strengthen their voices in the development landscape. These networks have also hoped to be spaces for innovation and opportunities to catalyse new ideas. The formation of these networks has also attempted to mediate some of the concerns of tensions and inequalities amongst diasporic communities, offering spaces for diasporas from different backgrounds and generations to come together and discuss development concerns.



# Chapter 6: Learning from the past for the future

Over the last 30 years AFFORD has tried to challenge some of dominant tropes associated with 'development'. Their work has attempted to raise the visibility, legitimacy, and acceptance of diasporic actors in development spaces, and they have been vocal about shifting imaginaries and perceptions of both Africa as a place and what concepts of development can mean. They have articulated a transnational and global geography of development, connecting struggles and peoples on and outside of the continent, perhaps this could be termed 'a diasporic geography of development.' Framing their work as a continuation of a historical legacy stretching back to the Sons of Africa in the 1700s, AFFORD articulate the potential of transnational actions for enacting change in and across multiple places. Drawing on their personal experiences and histories the people involved in AFFORD asked (and continue

to ask) critical questions of the global development industry, and through AFFORD we can see how people coming together reflecting on their own personal experiences can generate knowledge, learning, solidarity, and action (Choudry & Vally, 2018). Civil society then can be a significant site of knowledge production, in this case about the connections between migration and development. This production of knowledge has not always been able to have as larger an impact AFFORD would have liked, as Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie reflects:

*"We partnered with two academics, Giles Mohan who was then at the Open University and Professor Alfred Zack Williams who was then at Nottingham... to undertake a research project and we were disappointed that we were rejected. And we were rejected on the basis that some academic who had reviewed our proposal said, 'Can you rely on the diaspora to be objective about diasporas*

*propositions of development?’ Now my regret, one of them, is that we gave up at the first hurdle, I think we should have pressed on because I think you would have had an easier job because we would have had a lot more peer review and publications as a result of that had we persevered and I think it’s a lesson that is important to reflect upon and remember because it’s one thing to have minorities as we are in the UK context establish an organisation like AFFORD and it’s good and we break boundaries and all of that, but we haven’t got that trail of research and publication which we could have had to be honest, it wasn’t outside of our reach whatsoever.”*

Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie, 23 May 2023

Whilst Chux reflects disappointedly on opportunities denied, Gibril Faal articulates more optimistically AFFORD’s potential financial impact on the development landscape:

*“But if you want to think of what its financial impact on international finances is, I think you are talking of tens if not hundreds of billions of dollars in terms of how clarity of thinking, policy around remittances and other things have unleashed, not for Africa, but the entire global diaspora, it has made that space open up for the benefit of sustainable development.”*

Gibril Faal, 23 May 2023

But what can we learn from looking at AFFORD’s work over the last 30 years?

Perhaps that civic spaces can foster radical and progressive potential, offering opportunities for experimentation and testing out new ideas; that there has been a series of sweeping changes in how the migration-development nexus is conceived, and AFFORD, along with other actors have been part of this shift; that approaches to development in Africa have also changed, with Africa perhaps now seen as a space of investment potential, rather than charity; that civil society can also nurture narratives of ‘a rising Africa’. It shows us that diasporic engagement in global development can help turn the lens towards the global North and its historical and contemporary legacies and responsibilities. Yet there is also a possibility that by focusing on the ‘rising Africa’ narrative concerns for human rights and social justice and inequality can become lost, with questions to be asked about what a focus on entrepreneurship marginalises, both in Africa and in diasporic communities.

How to continue to be ‘disruptive’ is then a key concern, particularly as we are witnessing a squeezing of civic spaces in Britain and around the world. In her recent book Ipek Demir (2022:6) argues that diaspora is “a critical concept, claiming its transformative and far-reaching potential.” How to embody this in a landscape hostile to the idea of migration and in which development is becoming increasingly associated with the private and diplomatic sector is a crucial

question for civic organisations such as AFFORD.

There is also the possibility of learning from past struggles. There is a need to reflect on how the diaspora-development nexus has been operationalised, and whether the operationalising of these policies produces just and equitable partnerships. It is important to question the dynamics that exist within diasporic civil society ecosystems, and whether these reproduce or subvert dominant power relations. The category of 'diaspora' is a powerful one, with the tendency to marginalise certain voices and perspectives, with diaspora tied up with workings of power (Ho, 2015; Mullings, 2012). Heterogeneity, tensions, divisions, and differing perspectives within diasporic communities are not always acknowledged. How to maintain diasporic spaces as ones which are open to these tensions is crucial. Significantly, the context in which development is being conducted is constantly changing, with new actors, priorities and ways of working shaping the landscape in unexpected ways. As a wider range of actors enter the sector, a key question that continues to drive AFFORD's work is how to engage with newer actors and ways of working whilst maintaining a sense of diasporic agency as Stella Opoku-Owusu (AFFORD's current Executive Director) explains:

*"The challenge that we now have is that*

*in terms of the institutions, especially those that are backed by governments, where they have these priorities – it's great that they're in this space because we work with them, we work with all of them. But of course, a challenge also is about ensuring that we're still, in terms of diaspora organisations, having agency within the work that we're doing... And that's really important if we're going to continue to do the work that we're doing or to even evolve, to make the impact that we want to make, to ensure that all the diaspora in this space are also able to make the impact that they need to make."*

*Stella Opoku-Owusu, 8th August 2023*

Maintaining a sense of diasporic agency and voice in the context of a re-formulating global development landscape, particularly in relation to bi- and multi-lateral agencies is important. As development continues to become increasingly technocratic and managerial there is a danger of renewed exclusion of diasporic voices. Alongside this marginalisation there remains a desire to harness diaspora resources for development, with diasporic groups becoming increasingly concerned about the regressive nature of the way they are currently being positioned in the sector. As AFFORD have commented *"we [the diaspora] do not want to be junior partners in our own experience"* (Onyekachi Wambu, 22 September 2023). As we write this Britain's relatively newly formulated Foreign, Commonwealth

and Development Office (FCDO) do not have a policy for diaspora engagement in development.

Reflecting on AFFORD's 30 years as an organisation accentuates the people who are part of AFFORD as crucial. Questions remain for AFFORD as an organisation about their funding strategy, in which grant funding in the global development industry can be unpredictable and insecure, as Gibril Faal acknowledges:

*“The real question still remains the financial viability. I think AFFORD can be ... It need never be a huge organisation, but it's still, in my view, in terms of doing the core activities, it's still about £1 million a year organisation and how do you get the resources to guarantee that? And part of the failures also is maintaining continuity, which is not in its hands. The things AFFORD can do continuously, like the people who are committed to AFFORD, that's continuous. All of the other people we know are supporters AFFORD. At any time, you need them, you can go to them and they will come. But policymakers, funders, there is no continuity. There's ups and downs, so you cannot secure it. If anybody was listening, what I think AFFORD needs is an endowment, a significant grant that allows it to earn money to look after itself, a significant grant perhaps even linked to a significant building. Then you also have a permanent home.”*

Gibril Faal, 23 May 2023

Here Gibril also details the human resources required to sustain an organisation such as AFFORD. Whilst AFFORD has a number of incredibly dedicated supporters and members, perhaps an area which requires further work is how to engage young people of African heritage. This is a question common to many diasporic organisations in Britain, who have seen a change in their role and position in society as generational changes occur and the relationships people have to both Britain and Africa changes. Work with diasporic youth in Britain has shown the nuances and complexities of being part of a 'new generation' of diaspora (Mavroudi, 2023), including struggles over identity and belonging. An approach to working with young people of African heritage that engages with these tensions will be important for AFFORD as they look to the future. Learning from previous engagement with young diasporans and being able to craft spaces through which they can engage is integral to the future of the organisation. Understanding their worlds, priorities and passions is also seen as critical to the future of AFFORD, as Stella Opoku-Owusu and Ndidi Njoku articulate:

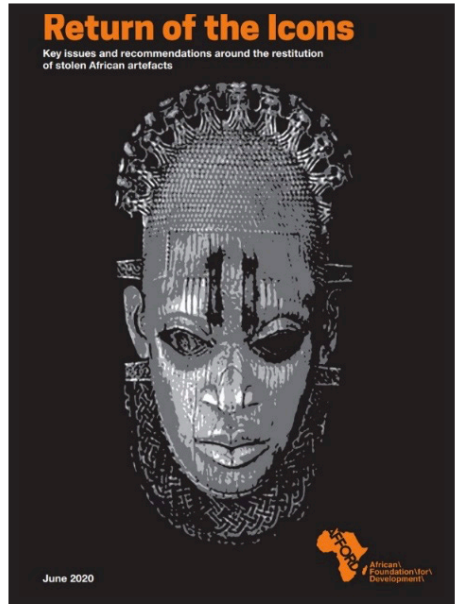
*“It's about working with the younger generation as well and bringing them into this. And it needs to be consistent and some of that really, for us in lots of ways, it's been consistent but perhaps hasn't*

been sustained in the way that we would like it to be sustained...Every year we engage a number of interns who come in to work with us. We do a lot of sharing of our work at different universities and going in to speak with students, and so a fair bit of lecturing. We do a lot of that but it's about bringing some of those along with us, like myself. I suppose I had enough motivation to stick around and to come back, but how many people have that sort of drive? You can build that drive and we need to be able to do that as well, and then to be able to take that with us and look forward, because that's going to be important for sustaining the work."

Stella Opoku-Owusu, 8 August 2023

"It's definitely [important] to incorporate more of the younger generation within the work of AFFORD and incorporate the ethos of AFFORD within the younger generation...So, yes, it's just how do you incorporate the younger generation within the strategy of AFFORD, the development within the next 30 years of AFFORD and get them engaged."

Ndidi Njoku, 1st December 2023



©AFFORD, *Return of the icons*, 2020

Whilst these challenges remain AFFORD's work continues, with contemporary projects focusing on reparative justice (through the Return of the Icons project) alongside diasporic investment in Africa. This attention to reparative justice asks critical questions about Britain's (and wider Europe's) ongoing neo-colonial relations to Africa through museum spaces and heritage objects in Britain, Europe, and Africa. By connecting reparative justice with heritage, the project links contemporary job creation in heritage tourism in Africa with engagement with colonial violence and erasure and its continuities in the present day. This articulates the core work of AFFORD to change the position and imaginaries of Africa in the global landscape, and to

challenge the neo-colonial relations that shape the contemporary moment across transnational geographies. It connects struggles in Africa with those in diasporic communities. With increasingly hostile environments for migrants in many countries, organisations such as AFFORD represent spaces of refuge and hope. How AFFORD engages with key struggles within the contemporary development landscape, particularly the climate emergency, will be crucial to its future. With an increasing number of African-led organisations in the sector it is crucial for AFFORD to define their position and be able to articulate where their strategic focus is. Whilst in the past they have engaged with multiple strands of work, perhaps now is the time to concentrate their work around a few key aims. As AFFORD looks beyond the borders of Britain work through its offices in Sierra Leone, Ghana, Belgium, and Nigeria will become increasingly important. For Nicholas Atampugre it is the potential to nurture relationships across Africa and in the global diaspora that is important for the future of AFFORD:

*“AFFORD is home to people – anybody that seems to identify themselves as Africans whether they be located on the continent or not. It doesn’t really matter, but it’s your consciousness of your identity as an African which is important. I think that going forward, I’m seeing a lot more movements towards that direction. And like I said, the key is the day that Africa stops being the basket of despair and [is instead] the continent of hope.”*

*Nicholas Atampugre, 4 May 2023*



# References

- Adi, H. 2019. *Introduction*. In Adi, H (Eds) *Black British History: New Perspectives*. London, Zed Books. 1 -15
- Ashutosh, A. 2020. The spaces of diaspora's revitalization: Transregions, infrastructure and urbanism. *Progress in Human Geography*. 44(5), 898–918. 10.1177/0309132519868765
- Choudry, A. & Vally, S. 2018. *History's schools: past struggles and present realities*. In Choudry, A. & Vally, S. (Eds) *Reflections on knowledge, learning and social movements. History's schools*. Abingdon. Routledge. 1-19.
- Demir, I. 2022. *Diaspora as translation and decolonisation*. Manchester. Manchester University Press.
- Féron, E. 2023. Memories of violence in the Rwandan diaspora: intergenerational transmission and conflict transportation. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 10.1080/01419870.2023.2261285
- Ho, E. L. E., Hickey, M., & Yeoh, B. S. (2015). Special issue introduction: New research directions and critical perspectives on diaspora strategies. *Geoforum*. 59: 153-158. 10.1016/j.geoforum.2014.12.006
- Koinova, M. (2018). Diaspora mobilisation for conflict and post-conflict reconstruction: contextual and comparative dimensions. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44, 1251-1269 10.1080/1369183X.2017.1354152
- Mavroudi, E. 2023. Young people's articulations and geographies of diasporic politics: Perspectives from the Greek, Jewish and Palestinian diasporas. *Political Geography*. 101. 10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102822
- Mohan, G. 2008. Making neoliberal states of development: the Ghanaian diaspora and the politics of homelands. *Environment and Planning D-Society & Space*. 26: 464-479. 10.1068/dcos3
- Mohan, G. & Zack-Williams, A.B. (2002) Globalisation from below: conceptualising the role of the African diasporas in Africa's development. *Review of African Political Economy*. 29:92, 211-236. 10.1080/03056240208704610
- Mullings, B. 2012. Governmentality, Diaspora Assemblages and the Ongoing Challenge of "Development". *Antipode*. 44: 406-427. 10.1111/j.1467-8330.2010.00857.x
- Steven, C.A. 2019. *The evolution of ideas and practices amongst African-centred organisations in the UK 1975 – 2015*. In Adi, H (Eds) *Black British History: New Perspectives*. London, Zed Books.144 – 162.
- Van Hear, N. et al., 2004. *The contribution of UK-based diasporas to development and poverty reduction*. Available from: [https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/ER-2004-Diasporas\\_UK\\_Poverty\\_Reduction\\_DfID.pdf](https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/ER-2004-Diasporas_UK_Poverty_Reduction_DfID.pdf)
- Zembe, C.R. 2019. *Quest for a cohesive diaspora African community: reliving historic experiences of Black Zimbabweans in Britain*. In Adi, H (Eds) *Black British History: New Perspectives*. London, Zed Books.199 – 218.



# Notes:

---

- <sup>1</sup> AFFORD (2001) Africans without border: Development from a distance? 3.12.1
- <sup>2</sup> The African Diaspora (2023). Available from: [thestateofafricandiaspora.com](https://thestateofafricandiaspora.com)
- <sup>3</sup> Remitscope (2022). Available from: <https://remitscope.org/africa/>
- <sup>4</sup> AFFORD (2004) Memorandum submitted by the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD). Maximising the benefits of Migration. Available from: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmintdev/79/79we06.htm>
- 5 AFFORD (2012) Diaspora influencing case study: AFFORD. 2.1.24
- 6 AFFORD (1997) Annual report 1.1.13.
- 7 AFFORD (1997) A survey of African organisations in London 2.1.4
- 8 AFFORD (2021) Written evidence submitted by AFFORD 2021 to Foreign Affairs Committee Inquiry on Nigeria. 7.1.4
- 9 AFFORD (2020) AFFORD 2020 Advocacy UK government classify MTOs as essential. 7.1.3
- 10 All-Party Parliamentary Group on Diaspora, Development and Migration (2014) Available from: <https://afford-uk.org/afford-institute/all-party-parliamentary-group-on-diaspora-development-and-migration-appg-ddm/#:~:text=The%20All%20Party%20Parliamentary%20Group%20on%20Diaspora%2C%20Development,enhance%20their%20contributions%20to%20the%20international%20development%20agenda>
- 11 AFFORD (1997) 22 Nov.97 planning meeting. 4.6
- 12 AFFORD (2003) What can the African diaspora do to challenge distorted media perceptions about Africa? 2.1.23
- 13 AFFORD (2011) SEEDA development volunteers programme 2006-2011. 3.6.1
- 14 AFFORD (2007) Annual Report 2007. 1.1.12
- 15 AFFORD (2008) Annual report 2008. 1.1.11
- 16 AFFORD (2017) Annual report 2017. 1.1.4
- 17 AFFORD (2005) RemitAID Introduction. 2.1.6
- 18 AFFORD (2014) Facing the future with focus' this details AFFORD's strategic direction, building on the 1998 survey of African organisations. 4.13
- 19 AFFORD (2016) ADEPT - 10 Achievements - July 2016. 3.2.7
- 20 AFFORD (2016a) DEMAC conference October 2016. 3.3.3

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]