

## From 'brain drain' to 'brain circulation'

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Article blurbThe majority of Africans who acquire training abroad are returning home because of the benefits derived from their knowledge to their communities and countries at large.

Brain drain has always been viewed in a negative way often castigating highly skilled professionals for abandoning home in search of greener pastures in developed countries. However, according to Ghanaian born New York University Professor Yam Nyarko the trends have changed from brain drain to the desirable brain circulation.

Professor Nyarko argues that more than half of the Africans who immigrate to developed countries actually return home with innovative initiatives.

He highlighted this at a workshop titled *Building Knowledge Societies in Africa: What Makes the Difference, People or Policies?*.

Professor Yam Nyarko delivered a presentation *Diaspora: How to make it Happen*.

He called upon African governments to be more aggressive and support people in the Diaspora as they have a significant contribution to make towards empowering communities back home.

"It should be understood that many people who leave actually return home. The government's role is to support them, so it is not brain drain instead it is brain circulation. If you look at many African countries, you will find that innovative things are being done by those who return to the country."

He said that according to many surveys, 60% of the Africans who go to United States of America actually return home.

Prof. Nyarko used his home country Ghana as an example of the brain circulation phenomena. At DATA bank, Ghana's premier indigenous investment bank, was started by members of the diaspora and Ashesi University, a leading university in Ghana. "The gentleman worked at Microsoft for about six years and when he returned he set up one Ashesi University."

He also drew examples from fast growing countries in Asia which are taking advantage of their natives in the diaspora to make a difference in their home countries.

"If you look at India, China, a lot of the high tech industries are being sponsored by or run by people who used to live abroad and who are part of their brain circulation. These are facts on the ground and explicit examples," he noted.

He called upon governments to recognize the advantage of the people in the diaspora. He emphasized that governments through embassies should join hands with professional societies in the United States, Canada, and United Kingdom to actively try and get people in the diaspora to return home.

He also gave an example of a famous Chinese mathematician working at the prestigious John Hopkins University who was directly contacted by the Chinese government to help set up an engineering school at one of the biggest Chinese universities.

"The Chinese government was happy to do that. The key point is that the governments have to be aggressive and pinpoint key people, encourage them to come back and give them the support," he concluded.

Aida Opuku-Mensah, Director, ICT and Science & Technology Division, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, who chaired the session concurred with Prof. Nyarko. "Prof Yam is very right and I agree with him, I believe that there are pros and cons to losing skills to labour and it is not a drain but more of brain circulation."

Opuku-Mensah noted that when people leave Africa for the diaspora they maintain linkages home through either social network of families or by doing business.

"Actually they are the bread winners, they support families' home, that is very positive because it is people in the diaspora contributing towards the economy by helping their own people through social networks," she observed.

"Governments should be able to harness that in a more productive way, because you hear people in the diaspora get frustrated by not having the right environment to really fulfill their potential, if governments can be forward looking and thinking, they can really make full benefit out of this brain circulation," she concluded.



**Professor Yam Nyarko makes a case for 'brain circulation'**  
Pic: Angella Nabobwe