

# Effect of Brain Drain or Skilled Labor Migration on Economic Development

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## Abstract

This paper reviews the problem of brain drain or skill migration from developing countries mostly to industrialized countries. Some case studies are presented to illustrate some of the major problems facing Africans today in not being able to utilize optimally the human as well as material resources endowed to us by Almighty God to enable us to render our expertise for the development of our continent Africa. This proposal includes the setting up of an International Academy of African Academics and Professionals in Diaspora (IAAPD). It is envisaged that IAAPD will have a Talent Bank which will be a database on African Academics and Professionals living and working inside African countries as well as outside with detailed information about the experts, their areas of expertise and products developed etc. Furthermore professional resource centres which will be land-based as well as cyberspace or virtual based will be set up made up of published information (journals, technical reports) and specialized research equipment/facilities available in African countries where African Academics and Professionals can have access to for their use as well as for developing upcoming African Academics and Professionals. It is envisaged that African countries will create the enabling environment through entry visa and professional short visit regulations for African academics and professionals to use their Sabbaticals, annual vacations, study/research leave, professional short visits etc. academic/professional staff exchange to go to other African countries to render their service.

## Introduction

The brain drain or skilled labour migration is not a recent phenomenon, but over the last few years, it has caused much concern. Brain drain or skilled labour migration according to the United Nations definition is defined as a one-way movement of highly skilled people from developing countries to the developed countries that only benefits the industrialized countries.

When a highly qualified professional chooses to leave his own country for another, he does so for one or several legitimate political or economic reasons: peace and security for himself and his family, job satisfaction, education, better pay and conditions, a higher standard of living, etc. Throughout history, countries and centres of academic excellence which offer these attractions have received the largest numbers of professional migrants and these have, in turn, made substantial contributions, not only to the economic growth of their host countries but also to the scientific and technological advancement of humanity. The negative impact of brain drain has also been stressed in the New Growth literature (Haque and Galor, 1995). Most studies underline the positive impact of migrations on human capital formation, but when turning to the issue of the brain drain, observed that there is a detrimental growth effect. For example, (Haque and Kim 1995) found that “brain drain” reduces the growth rate of the effective human capital that remains in the economy and hence, generates a permanent reduction of per capita growth in the home country”.

There is a strong consensus that deficiency in human capital is a major cause of African countries remaining poor. To render matters worse, when reasonable quantities of human capital are formed,

quite a significant number are lost due to migration leakage. No wonder then that the concern has been to contain the leakage. In the words of a recent World Development Report: "Can something be done to stop the mass departure of trained workers from poorer countries?" (World Bank, 1995). Returning professionals also need to find a place to work. Until a few years ago, the Gambia did not have a university and had to spend a significant proportion of state funds to train and educate its professionals abroad. Those who became professors abroad could not return, as they had nowhere to ply their trade. In many other African countries, educational institutions are poorly funded and resourced, while there are few private sector jobs. Although governments promise to redress such shortcomings, they still spend very little on specialized areas such as science and technology. The continent's share of investment in research and development is only 0.5 per cent of the global total and it spends 0.8 per cent of the world total on scientific publications. Also, Africa desperately needs universities devoted primarily to research.

Africa's problems are further aggravated by the under-utilization of those skills it already possesses, notes UN Economic Commission for Africa Deputy Executive Secretary Lalla Ben Barka. "In every African country," she says, "there is a paradox of high rates of unemployment and under-employment among school leavers, including university graduates — even scientists and engineers."

## **Brain Drain or Migration of skilled labour**

When people leave their countries of birth to other countries (migration), they gain many benefits including money, a better quality of life and a challenging environment in which they can thrive and fulfil their potential. Indeed in the West, actions are linked to results and hence work has a purpose. All of these benefits emanate from the fact that the leading nations of the world such as the United States, Britain, Germany, Australia, Japan etc. have systems that function. The capitalist nations have separated God from the affairs of life and believe that individual freedom must reign. They are convinced that the earth and all its resources are for them and they struggle to dominate it, driven by insatiable greed and the belief that their ideas should be the reference point for all. The manifestation of such a vision is a concerted effort. Western nations, and especially the leading nations, work to be the best, as this is required to achieve the dominance they seek.

All properties and resources are held in trust by human beings, to be used only in accordance with their divinely ordained purposes. Rights of ownership and usufruct are distinct and separate, and while property rights are rigorously safeguarded there are important restrictions on the use of the property. Every member of society is entitled to benefit from a common resource to the extent of his need, so long as he does not violate, infringe, or obstruct 'the equal rights of other members. The user is also held accountable; in return for profiting from a renewable natural resource, he is obliged to maintain its value. If he causes its destruction, impairment, or degradation, he is held liable to the extent of repairing the damage, for he has violated the rights of every member of society. To the extent that a common resource is not sufficiently abundant for everyone to use it freely without impinging on one another's rights, the dire rights of usufruct should be allocated according to the following considerations:

- 1) The degrees of need;
- 2) The impact on the resource,
- 3) Investment in the resource by way of work and capital;
- 4) Priority in time of the claim upon the use of the resource, and
- 5) proximity to the resource.

## **Some case stories on brain drains or skilled labour migration**

“Immigration is always a gamble. But when it goes right, everyone wins,” says the Economist. Yes, but... In the case of Africans immigration, the gamble has often gone wrong. International migration of skilled persons has assumed increased importance in recent years reflecting the impact of globalization, a revival of growth in the world economy and the explosive growth in the information and communications technology (ICT). A number of developed countries have liberalized their policies for the admission of highly skilled professionals.

While it is obviously not possible to prevent people from migrating to developed countries for better prospects in this era of globalization and democratic governance, the adverse impact of such movements on development and poverty in developing countries and policy options to mitigate such impacts merit serious attention

### **Brian Drain from Arab Nations**

A report by the Arab League estimated that losses to the Arab nations as a result of the migration of Arab intellectuals to Western nations amounted to about \$ 200 billion, noting that the Western states are the greatest beneficiary through hosting 450,000 Arabs with higher scientific qualifications. The report warned that the migration of Arab intellectuals and scientists is, but a new catastrophe which threatens the future of the Arab nations in the area of technological and scientific competition with Israel.

The report added that Israeli has won in the competition for scientific struggle with the Arab states through attracting European scientists of Jewish extraction and settling them inside Israel at a time when the number of Arab scientists emigrants increased to foreign states. So far the Arab nations have failed to benefit from restoring back its scientists or to make use of them. It is worth noting that scientific investment in the Arab nations is low, and the tools of cooperation such as advanced communication and collaboration infrastructure are not advanced or even available in some states.

Also, it is worth noting that the general environment prevailing in many Arab states is not attractive to those intellectuals who seek an open and transparent environment that provides for tangible and intangible issues such as free speech (“[www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/010227/2001022720.html](http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/010227/2001022720.html)”)

### **Brain drain from Africa reportedly costing \$4 billion a year**

Africa, which has serious shortages of manpower, has been worst hit. It is said to have lost more than 60,000 professionals (doctors, university lecturers, engineers, surveyors, etc) between 1985 and 1990 and to have been losing an average of 20,000 annually ever since.

Every year, thousands of qualified doctors, lawyers, architects and other professionals leave Africa for the west. They are tempted by significantly higher wages and brighter prospects. There are more than 21,000 Nigerian doctors practising in the United States alone. Meanwhile, Nigeria’s own health system suffers a cruel lack of medical practitioners. Sixty per cent of all Ghanaian doctors trained locally in the 1980s has left the country, according to the UNDP’s 1992 Human Development report. In Sudan, 17%

of doctors in the UK made up of more than four thousands specialist doctors and dentists, whilst 20% of university lecturers, 30% of engineers and 45% of surveyors have gone to work abroad. In Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa, for example, the flight of doctors has been so overwhelming that they have had to recruit hundreds of Cuban doctors to fill the gap.

The Kenya Medical Association (KMA) has said that only 600 doctors work in public hospitals out of more than 5000 registered doctors in the country. The rest either work abroad or in the private sector. The trends have been blamed for poor health services in Kenya, which has been ravaged by high rates of HIV infection and other communicable diseases. The chairman of the KMA, James Nyikal, urged the government to improve doctor's salaries.

Most Kenyan doctors dissatisfied with wages in Kenya move to the UK, Botswana, or South Africa. Opposition Member of Parliament, Paul Muite, has said that the UK recruits the most Kenyan medical personnel (The Lancet, 2001).

Although it is difficult to calculate the cost of an expatriate professional in terms of the nutrition, health care and education provided by households and the State, it is clear developing countries are losing colossal amounts of investment annually to the developed countries. Based on UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, Africa is losing as much as the US \$4 billion a year through top professionals seeking better jobs abroad, according to research by a senior economist at Addis Ababa University.

## **Most adversely affected countries by the brain drain**

The receiving countries are the winners while the sending countries are the losers. The receiving countries include the United States, Australia, UK, and West Germany. The sending countries include Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Ghana.

Nigeria has more than 1,000,000 immigrants in the United States alone. In the United States, sixty-four per cent of foreign-born Nigerians aged 25 and older have at least a bachelor degree. Forty-three (43) per cent of foreign-born Africans living in the United States have at least a bachelor degree. Nigerians and Africans are the most educated ethnic groups in the United States.

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) notes that in Africa, the loss of medical doctors has been the most striking. At least 60 per cent of doctors trained in Ghana during the 1980s has left the country. The phenomenon "is putting a huge strain on the continent," notes IOM Deputy Director-General Ndioro Ndiaye. To fill the gap created by the skills shortage, African countries spend an estimated \$4 billion annually to employ about 100,000 non-African expatriates.

"It is high time programmes and policies are put in place to reverse the devastating effects of the brain drain," she says. The wars in Ethiopia, Sudan, Angola and Zaire contributed to the brain drain problem.

## **HOW CAN THE BRAIN DRAIN BE REVERSED?**

When a highly qualified professional chooses to leave his own country for another, he/she does so for one or several reasons. Some of these reasons may be due to legitimate political or economic reasons: peace and security for himself and his family, job satisfaction, better pay and conditions, access to educational opportunities for self and or family, a better quality of life and a challenging environment in which they can thrive and fulfil their potential. Furthermore, professionals who trained abroad in certain specialized areas will become redundant because they have no place to practice the expertise

they have acquired, in their countries of origin, so they have no option but to stay abroad permanently. There are yet others who returned but because of the lack of systems at their homes, they prefer going back abroad. A number of developed countries have also liberalized their immigration policies for the admission of highly skilled professionals.

This brain drain can be reversed by setting a system and strategic short plan and long technological one. By recruiting and retaining them. Provision of recruitment incentives such as relocation expenses, loans for housing and for starting businesses, salary supplement for the first few years. For thousands of Africans living overseas and seeking ways to contribute to the development of the continent, initiatives aimed at staunching the outflow of professional expertise are offering new possibilities. Now, more than ever before, there exists “a major opportunity to transform the historical brain drain ... into a new African ‘brain trust’,” notes Mr John Sarpong of the Digital Diaspora Network Africa. He was among 130 heads of technology firms, non-profit organizations and UN agencies who launched the network in July 2002 as part of a resurgence of initiatives to reverse the loss of professional skills from Africa. Among those being targeted are scientists, medical doctors, engineers, university lecturers, economists, information technologists and other highly skilled people in short supply on the continent.

For the first time, the African Union has invited Africa’s Diaspora to actively take part in the region’s development. Heads of state who met for the African Union extraordinary summit in February 2002 agreed to amend the organization’s charter to “encourage the full participation of the African Diaspora as an important part of the continent.” This followed active lobbying by members of the Diaspora seeking recognition as agents for the continent’s development.

With the absence of formal structures, African Diaspora groups have generally relied on ad-hoc, disparate and small-scale programmes to assist in the development of the continent. Despite this, many have been able to help build schools, hospitals and roads, run training programmes, supply books and computers to deprived schools and establish scholarships to assist students.

Some initiatives use the Internet to attract skilled workers — like the thousands of South African doctors living in Canada — and make it easier for them to provide services to patients back home. Other programmes hope to entice skilled professionals to actually return to Africa.

The Kenya-based Research and Development Forum for Science-Led Development in Africa (RANDFORUM) has been exploring ways to repatriate African professionals and intellectuals, as requested in 1999 by the Presidential Forum on the Management of Science and Technology in Africa, a grouping of African heads of state. That year, a task force led by a former Zambian president, Mr Kenneth Kaunda, recommended that RANDFORUM and its sister organization, the African Foundation for Research and Development, identify overseas-based Africans interested in returning home to offer their skills. Another RANDFORUM project aims to relocate professionals from “distressed countries” — those that are faltering economically or politically, such as Liberia or Somalia — to where they can be productive. Rather than confine professionals and intellectuals from such countries to refugee camps, they are utilized elsewhere and returned once the situation in their countries normalizes.

The Nigerian National Universities Commission (NUC) in October 2004 launched the Nigerian Experts in Diaspora Scheme (NEADS) aimed at attracting Nigerian Academics and Professionals in Diaspora to contribute their quota to the development of Nigeria through short-term academic appointments. The major objectives of NEADS are to encourage the movement to Nigeria on a short-term basis of academics and experts of Nigeria origin for engagement in teaching research, and community service

activities in the Nigerian University System. To tap from the huge human resource of Nigerian origin based within and outside the country but located for the purpose of work outside the country. To encourage healthy staff movement, interaction, and collaboration across and within Nigeria Universities and other sectors of education and national development. To encourage experts in the industry to participate in teaching and research in Nigerian Universities. NIGERIAN RESEARCHERS, ACADEMICS & PROFESSIONALS ABROAD (NIG-RAPA) was set up by a group of Nigerians academics and professionals based in Malaysia with membership in the Asia- Pacific sub-region in 2003 with objectives like improving the level of human resources development in Academia, R&D Institutions, and Industry. Promotion of ICT culture in Nigerian universities. Exchange information on learning resources and teaching aids, e.g. E-books, E-lecture notes, etc. Organising short courses and regular courses/seminars for academic staff and postgraduate students, and industrialists for the development of knowledge and skill.

Promote the establishment of visiting professorships, which will involve activities such as external examination, curriculum design, review and assessment, and delivering of lectures to students. Provide support for postgraduate studies including placement for funded research programmes, and possibly co-supervision. Exchange information on possible research collaborations, short term research fellowships, funded conferences, etc.

The South African Network of Skills Abroad (SANSA) is another example of efforts at reversing the brain drain. Through its website, it invites professional South Africans to sign up. It reports that at least 22,000 graduates from five major South African universities resident abroad remain in touch with the universities. SANSA estimates that about 60 per cent of the country's expatriate graduates are located in six countries, with Australia, the UK and the US accounting for more than half of them. Looking at the nature of their skills, the group estimates that about 30 per cent of the University of Cape Town's contactable doctoral graduates are living overseas. They comprise significant proportions of the university's graduates in medicine, commerce, education and engineering, all areas in which South Africa has an acute shortage of skills.

Once professionals join SANSA, they may offer to train their South African counterparts or assist them to conduct research. They could facilitate business contacts and transmit information on research results not available in South Africa. SANSA members may also help to transfer technology to their home countries, such as providing computers and software. This is already being done in other African countries. The Africast Foundation, for instance, collects and refurbishes "retired" computers in the US for use in schools and poor communities in Ghana.

African professionals tend to migrate to Western Europe and North America. Many are dissuaded from returning home by the economic and political crises that have bedevilled the continent over the last few decades. Failing economies, high unemployment rates, human rights abuses, armed conflict and the lack of adequate social services, such as health and education, are some of these factors. Until recently, African governments had expressed little concern about the loss of skilled people, while development lending agencies often compounded the problem by obliging recipient countries to hire foreign expatriates, as part of the conditions attached to those loans. Moreover, politicians often portrayed countrymen who opted to work and live abroad as unpatriotic. But the sharp rise in skilled emigration and the serious human resource constraints facing the continent have forced many to rethink their views. Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo is one of the leaders actively attempting to address the challenges of the brain drain. On his trips abroad, President Obasanjo often meets professionals and intellectuals who have left Nigeria to ask them how they can contribute to their country's development. President Obasanjo also is one of the architects of the continent's new development framework, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

The New Partnership calls for the establishment of a reliable, continental database to determine the magnitude of the problem and promote collaboration between Africans abroad and those at home. An important NEPAD priority is to develop Africa's human resources and reverse the brain drain. Under NEPAD, African leaders explicitly call for the creation of the "necessary political, social and economic conditions that would serve as incentives to curb the brain drain...."

## **SOME STRATEGIES FOR SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF BRAIN DRAIN ACROSS AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

In order to create the enabling environment for African Academicians and Professionals, who will provide solutions to African countries in all fields of human endeavor like technology, science, law, commerce, as well as short to meet the challenges posed by globalization being imposed on the continent in particular and mankind in general some strategies are proposed to achieve these objectives.

- 1) Setting up a global organization to be known as the "International Academy of African Academics and Professionals in Diaspora" (IAAPD). It is envisaged that IAAPD will have branches in all African countries. IAAPD will develop a website for all Africans in Diaspora worldwide which will contain some of the following information;
  - a) Talent Bank which will contain information about African Academics and Professionals, their location, and area of expertise etc.
  - b) Concise up to date curriculum vitae of African Academics and Professionals available online with access based on permission being granted by the website manager or system administrator in consultation with the Academician or Professional.
  - c) Information about facilities e.g. research institutes/centres, specialized institutions like specialist hospitals, technology parks etc in African countries which can be made available for use by other African Academics and Professionals.
- 2) Through cooperation and networking among African nations, there will be the urgent need to create the enabling environment for easy mobility of Academicians and Professionals from one nation to another to render their services to one another for the benefit and development Africa. These objectives can be achieved through some of the following actions:
  - a) Introduction of a common K-passport in all African countries which will have inbuilt facilities like relaxed work permit, entry visa, and other immigration requirements for African Academics and Professionals. This will encourage Brain Gain from the present Brain Drain.
  - b) Relaxed entry visa, work permit etc. for ease of mobility of African Academics and Professionals. The possibility of granting short term passports of nations they will be going to render their services should also be looked into.
  - c) Encouragement of migration of African Academics and Professionals to get long term temporary residency as well as permanent residency in other African nations whose proximity will enable them to render more effective service/ expertise to the continent
  - d) African Academics and Professionals in Diaspora should be encouraged to go for their sabbaticals, study/research leave, professional short visit, annual vacations etc. There should be programs like academic staff/professional exchanges, external examiners, postgraduate training, receiving African students in their laboratories etc.
  - e) There should be accessible across all African nations for the use of their pooled resources like research institutes/centres, specialized institutions like specialist hospitals, technology parks, data banks, library resources etc.

- f) Provision of a competitive salary and fringe benefits.
- g) Consultancy and applied research and technology development/transfer in public research institutes.
- h) Participating in training or research via the network and initiating research and commercialization of products.
- i) Facilitating business contacts.
- j) Encourage Academics and Professionals to author books based on Islamic principles which will imply a paradigm shift, and publication of scholarly, professional, and application-oriented papers in journals.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, even though the brain drain is not a recent phenomenon, it has caused serious developmental problems in African countries over the last few years. The African continent is losing more skilled people every year. A project like IAAPD can be invaluable in recapturing some of the lost skills. However, we realize that the success of IAAPD depends on amongst other factors, the willingness and commitment of the expatriates, getting trusted relationships with political leaders etc. It is also important to go beyond just setting up the network, but ensuring that it is self-sustainable.

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