

Brain Drain: The Bane of African Underdevelopment

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Brain Drain is defined as the large scale emigration of highly skilled and educated individuals from developing nations, remains a critical factor contributing to Africa's underdevelopment. The paper examines how the persistent loss of talent weakens key sectors including healthcare, education, and Public Administration, resulting in reduced productivity and poor service delivery in many African countries. **Method:** The paper adopts dependency theory as its theoretical framework as put forward by Andre Gunder Frank. Frank believed that the world is divided into core (developed countries) and periphery (developing countries), and that underdevelopment in poorer countries is the result of their historical and economic dependence on richer countries. **Results:** The shortage of qualified personnel exacerbates poverty, limits innovation, and hinders sustainable development. Furthermore, the financial investment made by government in educating these professionals yields little return, as the benefits are transferred to host countries. Despite some potentials advantages, such as remittance and knowledge transfer through diaspora networks, the negative impacts of brain drain outweigh its benefits. **Novelty:** The way forward/recommendation is that all hope for development in Africa is not lost, but deliberate efforts must be made by African state to define in clear terms their development objectives, improve local working conditions, increase investment in infrastructure, promote political stability, and create opportunities for professional growth within the continent.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of African development has remained intractable since it has defied both radical and conventional wisdom. This evidenced by the fact that both short run and long run stabilization economic measures that have at one time or the other been employed in most African countries to stimulate economic growth and development have failed to yield the desired results some of these measures include borrowing from the IMF and the introduction of the western stereotype Structural Adjustment Programme all of which create more problems than the portend to solve. The underdevelopment of Africa and indeed the entire third world is, therefore, an endemic problem that calls for urgent global cooperation to deal with worse still the all pervading modernization process sweeping across the world today has brought in its train complex phenomena that have further compounded the underdevelopment of Arica. Among these phenomena, globalization and brain drain from Africa are at least for the time being, particularly detrimental to the development initiatives of post-colonial Africa. Besides, the nefarious activities of multinational corporations foreign loans, grants or the so-called aid as well as international trade that is lopsided in favor of the rich nations are

some of the other exogenous factors that have continued to impeded African development.

This is not to say that some endogenous factors have not contributed to the underdevelopment of the African continent.

In this regard, even some African scholars who use the dependency theory to explain the underdevelopment of Africa, notably Ade Ajayi [1], Nduka [2], Offiong [3] and even Rodney [4] admit that some endogenous factors, such as inept leadership and political instability have one way or the other created obstacles which have slow down progress in African developmental trajectory [5][6][7][8][9][10].

Conceptual Underpinning

Various definitions of brain drain have been given by different scholars among these definitions, the one by Mugima [5] is unequivocally apt and illuminating "Brain drain is the movement of the highly educated individuals from their countries of birth to other countries where they anticipate better opportunities". It is the movement of highly valued human capital from countries where they can make the greatest impact on development to countries that have already had a high concentration of such individual [6] Today, the phenomenon of brain drain cuts across the developing countries of the world, but Africa remain the most vulnerable region due to its peculiar level of political instability, social conflicts, civil wars, and pathetic economic conditions [11][12][13][14][15].

For now, there seems to be no end in sight to the nauseating trend of brain drain because the developed world which is the destination of the migrant professionals is generally politically and economically stable with better working conditions [16][17][18][19][20][21].

The implications of this situation for Africa are more enormous suffice it to say that brain drain is pushing Africa more and more into the vicious cycle of poverty and underdevelopment as skilled man power that would have been in the forefront of the vanguard for African development are lost to migration. It is also a loss of potentials tax payers [22][23][24][25][26][27].

Some scholars have argued that since it is difficult to stem the tide of migration to the developed world, emphasis should shift from moaning the trend to how Africa can derive maximum benefits from African professionals who have already migrated from the continent. Such scholars have suggested that there should be working cooperation between the African professionals in diaspora, who have over time acquired skills. In their based in Africa so that they can jointly fast track African development [28][29][30][31].

To this end, African governments have been challenged to establish viable networks with highly skilled African workers in diaspora so that through them Africa can obtain some level of technology transfer which will no doubt contribute to the development of the industrial sector in Africa [32][33][34][35].

This and the remittance of the migrant professionals and the prospects of their coming back home in the long run to contribute to national development can be seen as brain gains [36][37][38][39].

Nonetheless, the negative effects of brain drain on the African continent far outweigh the positive effects or gains, especially in the areas. Indeed, the implications of brain drain are multidimensional – social -economic, cultural, etc [7][40].

Brain drain is associated with massive emigration of well-Educated people, mostly professionals in various noble fields such as medicine, nursing, engineering, etc from poor counties to fully developed countries for greener pastures. This is facilitated by green card lottery which is use to lure African professionals to the USA in particular.

Records shows that in the last 50 years no less that 25 million professionals of African origin have left the shore of Africa for Europe and America in search of better working and living conditions. This of course constitutes a drain of African intellectual resources who ordinarily should stay at home to contribute their quota to the development of their father land [41][42][43][44]. Ironically, Africa has over years been spending about \$5 billion annually to employ over 250,000 expatiate professionals to perform jobs which trained African professional should have been doing as their contribution to the development of their respective countries [45][46][47].

The following statistical abstract shows the percentage of trained African professional who migrated from African to Europe and the USA between 1980-2000

Tale 1. Emigration from selected African countries to Europe and the USA between 1980-2000

Country of Origin	Period	Percentage
Ethiopia	1980 - 1991	75%
Ghana	1990 - 2000	54%
South Africa	1991 - 2000	22.6%
Nigeria	1990 - 2000	67.3%

Sources: Economic commission for Africa (ECA) and US Census Bureau Statistical Abstract: Washington Dc, 2003

Table 1 Shows clearly the percentage of African trained professionals (Medical doctors, Nurses, University lecturers etc) who migrated from their countries of origin in search of greener pastures between the period 1980 and 2000. It is an eloquent testimony to the fact that Africa is losing a lot of her intellectuals and valuable skilled manpower to the developed countries.

RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative research design grounded on the descriptive and analytical approach was employed in examining the phenomenon of brain drain and its consequences on African underdevelopment in this study. In other words, the study was based predominantly on secondary sources of data; the latter covered textbooks, journal

articles, government documents, reports from various international organizations (including the United Nations, UNESCO, World Bank, the Economic Commission for Africa, and relevant scholarly material on migration, dependency theory and African development). Using a descriptive method, they explained the nature, causes, and effects of the state of brain drain in Africa, and through an analytical approach, they were able critically to address the link between the migration of skilled professionals and the persistent underdevelopment of African states. The losses to the economy in these sectors, such as health care, education, public administration and technology, whose workforces are straining under the departure of an alarming number of experienced personnel, merit special note, he suggested. The studies further used dependency theory as a theoretical framework to explain how the disparity between developed and developing countries creates the push factor for the skilled African migrant to the European-North American region. Statistical analysis of existing data from the Economic Commission for Africa and the US Census Bureau from 1980 to 2000 was performed in order to illustrate the magnitude of occupational migration from selected African nations. The methodology was deemed appropriate as it allowed for an in-depth understanding of the structural and socio-economic drivers of brain drain whilst providing a valid framework for critiquing the effects of this flow of human capital on Africa's development trajectory.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Framework: Dependency Theory

Attempts have been made by scholars of Third world origin to explain the underlying causes of underdevelopment and the plethora of problems associated with it within the framework of the Dependency theory, otherwise known as the Neo-Marxist theory. Among these scholars were Emmanuel Wallerstein, Gunder Frank, Claude Ake, Bade Onimode. Their main contention is that the premature integration of the Third world economy into the world capitalist system has been the bane of development of the Third world. The integration, according to these scholars, created an enabling environment for the subjugation and rapacious exploitation of the Third world's natural resources by the western powers. The most frequently cited definition of Dependency is the one given by a Brazilian scholar, Dos Santos: [8]: By dependence, we mean a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected. The relation of interdependence between two or more economies, and between these and world trade, assumes the form of dependence when some countries (the dominant ones) can expand and can be self-sustaining, while other countries (the dependent ones) can do this only as a reflection of that expansion, which can have either a positive or a negative effect on their immediate development. In a similar vein, Vogler [9] argues that the forceful incorporation of the Third world economy into the world capitalist system has perpetuated poverty and underdevelopment in the Third world. According to him, "this

poverty and underdevelopment has been perpetuated, even aggravated by generations of western exploitation which have distorted and twisted the economies of the dependent territories". Similarly, Onimode [10] asserts that the development efforts of the Third world have been frustrated by the same processes that have facilitated the development of the developed capitalist countries. As he put it: On the contrary, while the advanced capitalist countries have been developing, there have been plundering the Third world through slavery, colonial and neo-colonial super profits and simultaneously under developing Third world countries by these same process. Therefore it is also false to suggest a diffusionist hypothesis by which development will trickle down to the underdeveloped countries without the termination of their imperialist exploitation. Onimode [11] laments further that the bulk of the world's technological and material sources are at the beck and call of a relatively few developed countries. He said:

Thirty developed countries with less than 30 percent of the world population now, and possibly only 20 percent of the world income, financial reserves and steel production, and 93 percent of the world's scientific and technological production.

On his part, Wallerstein [12] is of the view that the underdevelopment of the Third world can be appropriately explained within the context of the cyclical rhythms and secular trends of the world economy as a whole. He visualizes the world economy from two perspectives: (1) the centre and (2) the periphery.

Causes of Brain Drain in Africa

1. Economic Factors: Low wages, unemployment, and poor working conditions push skilled professionals to seek better – paying jobs abroad
2. Political instability and insecurity: frequent conflicts, poor governance and lack of political stability discourage professionals from staying in their countries.
3. Poor infrastructure and facilities: inadequate research facilities, health care systems, and educational systems, educational resources limit professionals ability to perform effectively
4. Lack of career opportunity: limited opportunities growth and advancement drive talents to countries with their prospect.
5. Corruption and poor governance: mismanagement of resources and lack of merit-base system discourage individuals.

Effects of Brain Drain on African Development

1. Loss of Skilled Workforce: Africa loses critical human capital needed for development in sectors like healthcare, education, and technology.
2. Weak Healthcare system: The migration of doctors and nurses leads to poor healthcare delivery and higher mortality rates
3. Educational Decline: Loss of experienced teachers and researchers affects the quality of education and innovation

4. Economic Slowdown: Reduced productivity and innovation hinder economic growth and industrialization. Dependency on foreign expertise which can be costly and unsustainable.

Possible Solution to Brain Drain

1. Improving Economic Conditions: Government should increase salaries, create jobs, and improve working conditions
2. Political Stability and Good Government: Ensuring peace, security and transparent leadership will encourage professionals to stay
3. Investment in Education and Research: Providing modern facilities and funding for research can retain intellectual talent.
4. Encourage Diaspora Engagement: African abroad can contribute through investments, knowledge transfer, and partnerships
5. Creating Incentives for Return Migration: Policies such as task breaks, housing and career opportunities can attract skilled professionals back home.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: Brain Drain remains a major obstacle to Africa's development by depriving the continent of its most valuable resource human capital. Addressing this issue requires a combination of economic reforms, political stability, and strategic investment in human development. If properly managed, Africa can transform brain drain into "brain gain" and accelerate its path toward sustainable development. **Implication:** Much also depend on the amount of efforts made by African leaders to diversify their economies and embark on export led strategy all of which will enable them to maximize their foreign exchange earning. The productive sector of the population should be trained and retrained and mobilized for popular participation in the drive toward sustainable development. African leaders have a critical role to play in charting the course of development and in avoiding the booby traps of the Bretton Woods Institutions, so that Africa's development efforts will no longer be thwarted. **Limitation:** The wind of globalization that is blowing across the world is as yet unfavorable to Africa due to her weak economic position in the international capitalist system dominated by the western powers. It is time for Africa to give the so-called recovery programmes that are often imposed on her by the imperial powers, backed by the IMF, and World Bank a hard look those programmes are alien and unworkable in African situation. **Future Research:** Far reaching economic reforms based on home grown, self-reliant programmes in individual countries in what Africa needs to cope with the vicissitude of the ever changing world economic order as it will in turn serve as a launching pad for rapid economic and industrial development in the 21st century. African states must mobilize resources to pursue the objective to their logical conclusion through strengthening the institutions of governance to create an enabling environment for democracy and rule of law to flourish.

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