

PROMOTING THE RECIRCULATION OF TALENTS BY AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Policy Paper on Strategies to Utilize Competent Nigerians in Diaspora for National Development

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"We are living through a transformation that will rearrange the politics and economics of the coming century," says Robert Reich. As we move into the borderless economy, the notion of national products, national technologies, and national corporations will become increasingly meaningless. The only things that will remain rooted within national borders are the people who make up a nation. This shift has enormous political implications. It means that the traditional idea of national solidarity and purpose can no longer be defined in purely economic terms. It also leads to fragmentation, as "those citizens best positioned to thrive in the world market are tempted to slip the bonds of national allegiance, and by so doing disengage themselves from their less favored fellows." (Robert Reich, 1992)

Introduction

What we are witnessing today is the end of what Reich calls economic nationalism — the notion that the members of a nation succeed or fail together and that they share a responsibility for the economic well-being of their country. This has been the guiding logic of Western economic thought for the better part of two centuries, Reich observes. Reich correctly describes two developments that have been crucial to this transformation. First is the changing nature of business among the highly competitive advanced industrialized nations. Standardized mass production is giving way to products that are custom tailored. Reich calls this a shift from "high volume to high value" production. Second, many large companies have lost their original national character. Today, for example, it is increasingly common to find a company headquartered in the original national country such as United States, but with research, design, and production facilities spread over other countries.

The combination of changing labor requirements and the rootlessness of big corporations has implications for all countries including Nigeria. Our basic argument is that the economic well-being of Nigerians or any other country within the increasingly globalization framework depends mainly on the value they add to the global economy through their skills and experience. Increasingly, it is the jobs that Nigerians do rather than the success of abstract entities like corporations, industries, or national economies, that determine their standard of living. If Nigeria provides the conducive environment for the works to be done in Nigeria, the country as a whole will benefit.

If not Nigerians who are skilled will be driven by their best self-interest and operate in contexts that offer them best possibilities.

For many decades, scholars and policy makers have been concerned about emigration brain drain and Diaspora. Emigration of highly skilled and talented workers, defined as having completed tertiary education (Lowell, 2001), from the global South to the global North is a major contributing factor to increased economic and social disparities in the developing world (Solimano, 2001) and creating financial, technological gaps. Skilled immigrants have historically played significant roles in fostering innovation and economic development of developed countries (Saxenian, 1998). Our focus in this paper is on skilled immigrants or intellectual or knowledge Diasporas. When skilled immigrants are not able to contribute to the development of their countries of origin, we have brain drain. How immigrants can also be organized to contribute to the economic development in their country of origin is the main concern of this paper. Our main argument which is not new is that skilled immigrants or 'diasporas' could contribute to their countries of origin if (a) their needs were better understood and addressed and (b) governments implemented appropriate policies to encourage diasporas efforts systematically.

The main objective of this paper is to show that skilled immigrants could be critical partners in national development. This is a policy paper that is designed to generate discussion and if possible agree on actions for implementation. The paper has three elements. One is examination of brain-drain in Nigeria. Two, is a review of Diasporas as a source of capital for development. Three, is a critical analysis of specific policy options that could be implemented by the various governmental levels and institutions in Nigeria.

Understanding/Examination of Brain drain in Nigeria

The peoples of Africa have a long history of leaving the continent to other places. In these entire exoduses by Africans to other places, it has always been the able bodied (during the slave trade) and talented (currently going on) that have always left the continent. We will argue that brain drain, whether during slave trade or currently with the outflow of scientists, medical practitioners, has been one of the greatest obstacles to the development of the continent. The negative impact of slave trade on Africa, with the loss of its finest human capital has been well documented (see How Europe Underdeveloped Africa etc.). Our concern in this paper is on how to manage and mitigate the negative impacts of the ongoing outflow of Africans to other continents.

The issue of brain drain for Nigeria is as old as sixty years. In the early years of 1950's and 1960s, there were outflows of technicians and scientists of Nigerian origin to Canada, United Kingdom, United States and other European and Southeast Asian countries (Gerashchenko, 2008: 4). This could be classified as the pre-independence brain drain. Much is not known about these early skilled migrants. Our hunch is that most of them were completely integrated in the societies they were living and also some of them came back immediately after independence to occupy the positions vacated by the colonial civil servants. Whatever may be the case, this group was not a significant Diaspora. The Nigerian Biafra Civil War 1967-1970 caused a major exodus of educated Nigerians to Western nations for security reasons. What the civil war did and the long period of instability due to series of military coups are (a) it made coming back to Nigeria unattractive to Nigerians that studied abroad (b) it created a situation where most people increasingly looked for opportunities to exit the country. Many succeeded very well in their adopted countries and thus began the twin issues of brain drain and Diaspora.

The third trigger of brain drain is related to oil boom and burst and consequently the structural adjustment program. The Nigerian oil boom of late 1970s did two things (a) it enabled the country to invest heavily in education especially tertiary education and created many educated people (b) it created unrealistic expectations that most Nigerians still carry along now. Most Nigerians felt that Nigeria has arrived. A lot of Nigerians returned to the country in search of Eldorado. Many Africans from neighboring countries and Asians migrated to Nigeria in search of money. The oil boom busted in the early 80's. This resulted into massive departure of Nigerians to the United States, Europe and the oil rich Arab countries. In fact, up to 10,000 Nigerian professionals moved into the United States alone in the year 1984 (Evans, 1989: 574).

The fourth trigger of brain drain is what we call the Nigeria no good mentality that started with the negative effects of the structural adjustment in the 80's which has lingered up to now. It started with many Nigerian students after studying abroad, found jobs, became permanent residents and established families in the adopted countries.

Many of these Nigerians cashed in on the advantages of deregulation, exchanged their foreign currencies, bought properties and showed off their wealth in Nigeria. This triggered a situation whereby many Nigerians would complete their education within their countries and migrated to the industrialized countries.

There are two main problems of brain drain in Nigeria. One is that it has more influences in the critical areas of national development such fields as technology, nursing, teachers, medicine, engineering etc. Second, is that it is increasingly growing. The UNDP Development Report (2009) showed that the Nigerian emigrant populations were 94.1 thousand (1960); 447.4 thousand (1990); 972.1 thousand (2005); and 1.2million (2010).

Considering the above two issues, we would like to argue that Nigeria as a developed country has been deprived of valuable personnel that could have made significant contributions to the economic development of the country.

Diasporas as Source of Capital

Diaspora, derived from the Greek, has been defined as the breaking up and scattering of a people or those settled far from the ancestral homelands (Seguin et al, 2006: 80). Sometimes, words such as nonresidents, second generation and labor migrants are sometimes used synonymously with the term Diasporas (Ionescu, 2005). Our concern in this paper is on scientific/ intellectual/knowledge-based Diasporas. This category of scientific/intellectual/knowledge-based diasporas (SIKBD) has been defined as a self-organized community of expatriate scientists and intellectuals working to develop their home country or region, mainly in science, technology and education (Barre et al.,2003). The main purpose of this discussion paper is to explore the options needed to ensure that Nigeria harnesses their skilled Diasporas, who represent an invaluable commodity.

Generally, we agree with Friedman's conception of skilled diasporas as part of 'world city' (Freidman, 1986). Let's call it the World City Hypothesis of Diaspora. Friedman's argument is that the economy in globalization context is oblivious to national or political boundaries. Consequently, he suggests a view of the world as a system of evolving networks with various nodes organizing multiple types of global flows, including flow of persons (Friedman, 1986). The international flow of persons shifts how populations are able to work in a world/global city (Sassen, 1991) and helps us to move away from the unidirectional view of brain drain towards the notion of brain circulation, which better represents the increasing mobility of highly skilled workers (Gaillard, 1998). Promoting the recirculation of brains does not have to be achieved through the permanent return or physical presence of expatriates. This could be increased by ensuring that Diasporas policies focus on harnessing the tremendous capital that skilled Diasporas could provide.

The key question is what capital can Diasporas provide? Diasporas capital potential can be seen from (a) financial contributions through remittances and (b) human capital capacity contribution. The issue of financial remittances has well been documented. The total value of official remittance transfers flowing into developing countries was in the past years estimated at over US \$200 billion (Hussain, 2005). **(What are African and Nigerian estimates?)** These have been cited as having both positive and negative effects. Some of the positive effects include: (I) stabilization of the sources of foreign exchange (ii) facilitation of children's education (iii) enhancing the standard of living of recipients through increased means of levels of consumption (iv) reduction of income inequality (Russell, 1986). Some of the potential negatives are: (I) reduction of labor efforts (Solimano, 2003) (ii) decreased incentives for governments to make policy changes to retain their skilled workers (Wucker, 2004). Some empirical estimation suggests that remittances have overall negative effects on economic development (Chami et al., 2003).

Although remittances have their potential and real benefits, it is probable that the migration of workers from developing to developed countries cannot be fully compensated by remittances (Rapoport, 2005). Recent studies indicate that education reduces the likelihood that a worker will remit (Ratha, 2003). Consequently, we will argue that the potential of highly skilled Diaspora is not being harnessed through remittances. We should look at (b) the human capital capacity contribution.

Generally, globalization with its advances in telecommunications enabled knowledge-based workers to become global citizens by allowing them to connect and contribute to knowledge centers throughout the world. Some of the known examples include: (a) the success of Taiwan's Information Technology sector development in the 1980's and 1990,s was to a large extent due to the efforts of Asian-American engineers in linking the economies of the Silicon Valley and Hsinchu Park; (b) the improvement of hospitals in India through sabbatical residences by the Indian-American community (Seguin et al, 2006); (c) the building of Colombian Science and Technology (S&T) communities through knowledge sharing strategies including professional contacts, conferences and seminars (Chaparro, 2004; Meyer et al, 1997); (d) China's 100 Scholar Plan, which aimed to attract 100 foreign educated returnees to work at the Chinese Academy of Science; (e) Mexico's Loan Forgiveness Program, (Becas CONACYT), which forgives students loans to Mexican students who have studied abroad if they return home to teach in a Mexican University (Lowell, 2001a); (f) Thailand's Reverse Brain Drain Project, which connects Thai institutions with Thais living abroad to encourage and increase collaboration on various technology focused projects (Lowell, 2001a).

There are many examples of attempts to build similar networks with relative successes. Some Nigerians have embarked on series of interventions (such as missions to communities). There is now a need to do some studies examining the impact, longevity and viability of these efforts. There is no question of what potentially African Diasporas can do in enhancing the development of the various countries. The interests are there; the energy is there with the Diasporas and some governments like the Enugu State and the ASUSA which have been carrying medical mission for a very many years in Anambra State of Nigeria. The problem is, after the mission who does the follow up? We think that a comprehensive Diaspora Policy may create a positive environment to (a) anchor some of these noble private and group initiatives (b) learn from other successful countries and (c) initiate our own robust agenda. In our search we found that governments with strong and comprehensive Diasporas policies such as China and India tended to do better in this area. We suggest we look at the examples of these countries and agree on what will be useful for Nigeria and Enugu State and Anambra State.

Suggested Policies for utilizing the talents of African Diasporas

In making our policy suggestions we have borrowed heavily from Chinese recent experiences; the Chinese, it is important to state followed the path of Republic of Korea and Taiwan. These are old tested best practices which we suggest could be examined, adapted, and adopted where and when suitable. What is empirically clear is that with these policies China has experienced (a) increasingly a picked-up return migration from under 1000 in 1978 to 25,000 in 2004 (ZWEIG, 2006); and (b) a sustained drop in the number of doctoral students from China who planned to remain in the United States beginning in the late 1990's (Saravia and Miranda, 2004: p608). This flow of return migration we think happened because of the creation of a positive environment that increasingly encourages returnees. This positive environment we will argue is as a result of (a) central government policies that go beyond espoused theory; (b) inter-organizational/inter-city/region competition for foreign trained scientists and academics; (c) competition among universities, research laboratories and other knowledge-based enterprises.

To successfully utilize the talents of Nigerian Diasporas will need a mental shift that will see the highly educated Nigerians living abroad as a brain power asset to be tapped for national transformation instead of 'people that are coming to take over our lucrative posts'. What we need to recognize is that the world with globalization has increasingly become a global market for talent and that Nigeria must compete within that market, even for its own people. For the transformation agenda to make significant and sustainable headway and impact, Nigeria, we posit should henceforth stress the infusion of human talent and technical skills, rather than attracting foreign capital as hitherto being practiced. We strongly think that foreign capital will inevitably come with increase in productivity which talents will unleash. Our war cry should be strengthening the country through human talent. As a country if we focus on cherishing talents and competence now we will be laying the building blocks of dealing with the national questions. Let talent and excellence be our guiding national principle. This principle will underpin our policy suggestions at the various levels, federal, state, and institutional.

Federal Government Policies to encourage Diasporas participation

Given that Nigeria is an evolving federal structure with its history of unitary operational experiences under Military governments, there are a whole lot of unresolved inter-governmental issues. We hope a new Constitution will wade into some of these areas for resolution. In this section we will like to suggest taxonomy of policy directions and when possible discuss some policies.

Mobilization of National Resources Overseas

To encourage highly talented Nigerians to return, the government should mobilize officials in embassies and consulates to organize the Diasporas in countries and cities that have the highest concentration of Nigerian experts. The federal government could set up educational bureaus in embassies and consulates to establish Overseas Students Associations and professional associations for overseas scientists, doctors and scholars. The education bureaus can organize key Diasporas to participate in conferences in the areas relevant. The selection of Diasporas participants could be tightened; in which the criteria of eligibility could be on the quality of paper to be presented as an example. The papers accumulated could be published in related journals. In fact, the education bureaus could establish journals in various areas where overseas scholars and home scholars could be sharing ideas.

Financial Support Policies

The government could provide financial support to young scholars, scientists and engineers if they return home. Some of the programs we envisage that could be supported include: (a) support for outstanding young professors programmed; (b) support for young innovators; (c) provision of seed money for young Nigerians who are willing to develop/experiment on things that could be relevant for national development.

Policies at easing the process of returning

As a way of easing the process of returning, the government should consider the following policies: (a) The government should support various cities to create schools/and school systems in Nigeria that will ease education transition of returnees;(b) The government should encourage Nigerian experts to return for short periods to engage in cooperative projects or give lectures; (c) People (through policy and programs) could be encouraged to return during their summer vacation (or leave period) to work for the country; thereby enabling some Nigerians to serve the nation from abroad instead of being pressed to return to the country permanently.

State Government Policies on Promoting Diasporas Participation

The governance architecture of the Nigerian federal system conceptually sees the state structure as where development should be managed. The long period of military interregnum has operationally distorted the idea as the military central command tended to have a unitary approach. As part of building the civil institutions of governance, that should be very inclusive, there is a strong need for states to accommodate the roles of the Diasporas in this process. As a result of pressures to boost the economic development of states, state and the various local government authorities should become aggressive recruiters of overseas talents to strengthen their economic administration. The new private enterprises, established by returnees could increase state and local employments and the government tax base.

To attract Diasporas to participate in the transformation of their various states and local governments will need some policies for the Diasporas. We are suggesting the following policy areas: (a) *preferential policies* that could include tax breaks for new firms established by returnees, subsidized housing, jobs for spouses, and special schooling arrangements for children; (b) *human talent market* through states establishing links with their respective states overseas scholars and collecting information of diasporas and their areas of expertise and helping them to find jobs in their states; (c) *center for returned overseas scholars and experts* that will serve as entry points for overseas scholars/entrepreneurs with few links in the country to steer them through the maze of paper work that could scare them from returning and engaging with the bureaucratic system; and (d) *special loan/loan guarantee* to young scholars/experts overseas that have innovative proposals for the states and local governments.

Institutional Policies to Attract Overseas Talent

Historically, universities and government funded research organizations in Nigeria have actively recruited Nigerians educated abroad. In fact, Nigerian universities have been key players in sending students abroad. The returning rate used to be high; but over two decades our hunch is that the rate is very low. The issue is what are the things that universities were doing when the students were doing? Are they still doing them or not? If not is it still possible to bring those policies back and review?

We will focus on some innovative policies that could attract very experienced talented Nigerians and the very young highly educated ones to participate: As part of improving the quality of faculty and administrative staff in universities: (a) ensure that 20% of leading positions in the universities and research fields come from accomplished scholars and experts from overseas; (b) provide good research benefits to young scholars who have new relevant ideas to experiment on in Nigeria; (c) provide housing/and or housing subsidies to returnees.

Key Issues for the Policies to work

We will like to state upfront that the above policies will only have impact if the quality of the returnees can be guaranteed. The key question is how good are the people who are returning? Are they really better than those who stayed behind? Did they acquire ‘transnational capital’ –i.e. skills, technology, information, networks and/or capital derived from time spent overseas –and thereby increase their value relative to locals? Or are they simply free riders? Another key question is whether returnees are of ‘high quality’ relative to people who have remained overseas? Or is Nigeria attracting mostly second-rate talent, while the best stay abroad. These are key questions that should inform the implementation of the policies otherwise efforts to reverse the brain drain may be successful, but not so useful for Nigeria’s long-term development.

Conclusion

Nigeria has invested a lot in its human development more than most countries. In fact, one of the early shots on human capital development was fired in Nigeria in the 1960’s through Ashby study and report. The problem with Nigeria lies in utilization of trained manpower. We spend time in cooking and less time in enjoying the meal. Many Nigerians (highly skilled) are living overseas brooding and thinking on how to make their contributions. If these highly skilled professionals are encouraged to play important roles as bridges for overall development, the potential to have sustainable impact more than all the foreign aids put together is substantial. Our goal in this policy discussion paper is to uncover issues and suggest areas of possible policies for policy makers to fashion out guidelines for governmental and institutional practices.

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