

above their initial pledge, benefiting 40 universities in 6 countries, with 23 countries receiving significant funding for systemic change. Nearly one-third million students benefited directly, including more than 1,000 female scholarship beneficiaries. The assessment also found that the foundations invested more on higher education than would have been possible without the partnership.

One leading initiative is in the area of information and communications technology identified as a priority intervention at a joint workshop with the UN Economic Commission for Africa. With an initial investment of more than \$5 million, the partnership commissioned the African Virtual University to consolidate bandwidth demand from several universities and negotiate its acquisition from satellite companies at a significantly lower cost. No single foundation would have had the network and the human resources to start and sustain this effort over time.

PHEA has also attracted the attention of other foundations and agencies. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation formally joined the partnership in April 2005. The six foundations have pledged to continue the partnership through 2010 and to invest \$200 million over the next five years, expanding the number of beneficiary countries to include Kenya, Egypt, and Madagascar. Four special initiatives will receive joint support: (a) provision of broadband and utilization of information and communication technology to improve access to information and production of knowledge in African universities; (b) development of research on higher education innovations, institutional transformation,

*While the African universities will ultimately determine whether our efforts have been successful, there are many signs that our collaboration is bearing fruit.*

and universities' contribution to development; (c) support to regional networks for research and training; and (d) a university leadership forum to expose academic leaders and policy-makers to relevant science and technology innovation.

Despite our best efforts, the partnership has not done enough to coordinate its initiatives with wider and more far-reaching strategies such as those for poverty alleviation, the 2020 national development plans, the Millennium Development Goals, or the sector-development approaches by which government-to-government resources are allocated according to national priorities. Foundations have the advantage of operating "outside" the bureaucracy of government-to-government relations and the flexibility to experiment with new and sometimes risky ideas and projects; however, this does not diminish the importance of keeping a country's strategy in mind. Equally, the partnership has a long way to go in coordinating with other African regional institutions (e.g., the

African Development Bank), the World Bank, and other major development agencies that also support education.

When the partnership was formed, there was, as is often the case with new endeavors, some skepticism about the venture. As we have worked together and honed our relationship over these past five years, even the most cautious observers began to appreciate the benefits of collaboration. While the African universities will ultimately determine whether our efforts have been successful, there are many signs that our collaboration is bearing fruit. ■

## Academic Staff Attrition at African Universities

WISDOM J. TETTEY

*Wisdom J. Tetey teaches in the Faculty of Communication and Culture at the University of Calgary. Address: Faculty of Communication and Culture, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB, Canada T2N 1N4. E-mail: tetey@ucalgary.ca.*

African universities continue to contend with a shortage of academic staff and so do not seem capable of mobilizing the intellectual strength needed to drive capacity-building efforts on the continent. To address this situation of a declining professoriate, a study was conducted at five African universities, with support from the World Bank, to identify mechanisms for university staff retention that are feasible in Africa under currently severe financial constraints. The institutions were the Universities of Botswana, Ghana, Ibadan, Kwa-Zulu Natal, and Makerere. The study was limited to particular fields of expertise, which have been identified as the most vulnerable to brain drain: health sciences, engineering, business, economics, and computer/information science. We sought to understand factors behind staff attrition, analyze what the case study institutions are doing to address them, and suggest feasible responses to the problem. This article focuses on the first two objectives.

Self-administered survey questionnaires were distributed to all academic staff in the targeted disciplines, at each of the selected universities, who did not hold administrative positions. They were anonymously completed, and the response rates were as follows: University of Botswana, 16.2 percent; University of Ghana, 20.14 percent; Kwa-Zulu Natal, 19 percent; and the University of Ibadan, 62 percent. In addition to the surveys, personal interviews were conducted with department heads, deans, and provosts in charge of the units representing the targeted fields of expertise, as well as with pro-/deputy vice-chancellors, vice-chancellors, and presidents of faculty associations.

Following the surveys and interviews, we organized work-

shops on each of the campuses to share our preliminary results with a representative group from the target units, as well as other members of the university community—including graduate students, members of senate, and human resource personnel. This forum provided an opportunity to revise or validate earlier findings and to get further input from those who did not participate in the surveys or interviews.

#### RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

All the target units and disciplines appear to have difficulty recruiting staff at the same time as some of them are losing existing staff. Ten members of staff in the Economics Department at the University of Ghana, most of whom were of the rank of senior lecturer have, for example, resigned over the last three years, mostly to take up positions with local and international organizations outside of academia.

In those departments where there is no significant attrition, the problem of recruitment is nevertheless a reality. They cannot compete with other institutions because of relatively poorer conditions of service. According to a senior lecturer at the University of Ghana, “compared with our colleagues in other public institutions in the country, what lecturers receive as salaries are peanuts.” Even the University of Botswana, which has been quite successful in attracting and retaining staff, is beginning to see its attractiveness as an employer eroded and is looking at a future that could be more challenging. The recruitment problem, in all cases, is compounded at senior levels, because the services of individuals at those ranks, in the target disciplines, are in high demand in a competitive job market.

A number of respondents indicated that they had thought about leaving their institutions over the past five years, but the number that had actually sought other jobs, or received offers, was very negligible. This suggests that most academic staff think that they have chosen the right profession and will remain in it, unless conditions become unbearable. Findings show that academic staff at the junior ranks (i.e., assistant lecturers and lecturers) are more likely to leave than their more senior counterparts. This pattern could be attributed to the fact that mobility is maximized by the potential for promotion among the junior ranks.

In addition to the difficulties universities are encountering in attracting and retaining younger academics, there is evidence that some academic staff, approaching the decade prior to retirement, get very anxious about the financial trepidations that tend to accompany retirement. As noted by a respondent at Makerere, “what happens to people when they retire has not been a good testimony to people who may want to stay longer in this University.” They, therefore, make decisions about quitting academia at a good enough time and taking up positions that are better paying and thus will ensure a more comfortable retirement, even if they do not get a large pension.

A disconcerting trend is the small number of students in graduate programs at African institutions. Part of the reason

for this state of affairs is the lack of resources to maintain significant research-based graduate programs, but the unattractiveness of academic jobs, because of unappealing salaries, is another factor that does not excite students to enter the existing programs.

This means that most graduates are not choosing academic careers, which implies that the existing stock of academics will not be replenished at a rate that is capable of sustaining their operations at optimal levels. The University of Botswana’s Staff Development Fellowships and Makerere University’s Staff Development Fund, which is supported from internally generated income, are examples of initiatives that have helped staff to obtain advanced training. Makerere University has, since 1998, set aside 7 percent of its privately generated funds each year to support staff development. Since its inception to date, the Staff Development Fund has been able to support 400 staff members to attain doctoral degrees, both from Makerere and other institutions around the world. The Leadership and Equity Advancement Program at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, is a commendable formal mentoring effort aimed at staff recruitment and development.

*Ten members of staff in the Economics Department at the University of Ghana, resigned over the last three years, mostly to take up positions with local and international organizations outside of academia.*

#### INSTITUTIONAL CLIMATE AND GOVERNANCE

The findings reveal that there are benefits to devolving some decision-making authority to units, instead of centralizing everything at the top. Devolution helps expedite action on issues and gives the units the latitude to be innovative in ways that are germane to their particular circumstances.

Expanded enrollments, without a commensurate increase in the capacity of universities to handle them, have resulted in an atmosphere that is not conducive to learning. Complaints about workload seem to center not so much on the number of courses that staff members teach, but more on the burden that is imposed by teaching large classes. Respondents expressed serious concerns about the impact of workload on their health and that of their colleagues. One respondent from KwaZulu-Natal intimated that “the load drove me to depression and I was booked off work.” There was also disenchantment in some institutions about inadequate facilities for teaching and research.

One of the ways that some institutions are addressing the concerns expressed is through the levying of Academic Facilities User Fees on students. The proceeds are then disbursed to departments to help them improve facilities. Some governments have instituted innovative schemes that are

directed specifically toward supporting infrastructure development and research capacity in universities. Examples are the Ghana Education Trust Fund and Nigeria's Education Tax Fund.

#### REMUNERATION AND BENEFITS

Dissatisfaction with salaries is a key factor undermining the commitment of academics to their institutions and careers and, consequently, their decision or intent to leave. Some institutions offer various allowances that supplement staff members' base salaries. Other creative ways of rewarding academic staff include salary "top-ups," which come from income generated through students enrolled in fee-paying programs. While highly commendable, these efforts should not be seen as a substitute for providing academics with "livable" salaries.

While salaries feature prominently in responses, staff are clearly willing to subordinate higher salaries to very good benefit packages that will enable them to live relatively comfortably during their working lives as well as after retirement. They, therefore, put a high premium on good health care coverage, car and housing loan schemes, support for children's education, and a reasonable pension. The idea of merit pay and market supplements for academics has met with a lot of controversy and resistance in various universities around the world. Because of the politically charged reaction that they evoke, all of the case study universities shy away from them, certainly in explicit ways.

*Dissatisfaction with salaries is a key factor undermining the commitment of academics to their institutions and careers and, consequently, their decision or intent to leave.*

#### CONCLUSION

The situation described above is not peculiar to African universities, but has resonance, albeit at different degrees of resolution, across tertiary educational institutions around the world. African universities should take the initiative in addressing some of the problems identified above, which are within their ability to solve. These include decentralizing authority, promoting communication among different groups, fostering transparency in decision making, and rewarding excellence. They must adopt creative ideas to mobilize resources from the public and private sectors, as well as international partners, to enhance their core mandate. However, the responsibility for revitalizing higher education, in general, and promoting recruitment and retention, in particular, does not lie exclusively with universities. African governments have an obligation to support these institutions with the investment needed to shore up their human resources and other capacities—so do the private sector and the international community, because they all stand to gain from a solid research infrastructure and an adequate complement of excellent teachers and researchers with-

in African institutions of higher education. ■

## Beyond Brain Drain: Possibilities and Challenges of Remitting Migrant Taxes

**DAMTEW TEFERRA**

*Damtew Teferra is assistant research professor and founding editor-in-chief of the Journal of Higher Education in Africa at the Center for International Higher Education, Campion Hall, Boston College, Chestnut Hill MA 02467, USA. E-mail: teferra@bc.edu.*

African migrants around the world contribute to the economic, social, political, and educational development of their home countries, albeit largely in an unorganized manner. Currently, both the migrant communities and their respective home governments—which largely failed to contain their massive flow—are making efforts to maximize their impact. Governments of host countries, however, are yet to play a visible role in mobilizing the resources of migrant communities for the socioeconomic development of host countries. This article explores a new frontier to help revitalize higher education in Africa by proposing the channeling of a certain portion of taxes paid by migrants to their home countries.

#### CHANNELING MIGRANT TAXES

Numerous well-thought-out and poorly conceived initiatives have been taken to address the challenges of excessive flow of high-level experts—widely known as brain drain. While the effort to stem the tide of expert migrants continues, albeit with limited success, the interest to tap their resources is gathering momentum. Some countries, especially in Asia, are doing a good job of tapping and channeling the financial, technical, and intellectual resources of their migrant communities for the development of their universities and research institutions.

In a large number of countries, especially in Africa, a more coordinated and efficient way of tapping resources is woefully lacking. And yet, most African intellectual migrants in the North, who are graduates of public institutions at home, are keen to give back to their communities and play an important role in the socioeconomic development of their native countries.

Mobilization of resources from diverse sources is central to maintain the growing needs of higher education development. African institutions, which face chronic financial problems, are currently grappling with a variety of resource mobilization mechanisms. It should be cautioned that exploring the mobilization of diverse "nonpublic" resources should never be con-