

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.

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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

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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-

strued as either shifting or diminishing the responsibility of governments as the sole providers for the higher education sector. To reiterate, it must be unambiguously clear that government support to the higher education sector is critical and should never be diminished.

Massive brain drain has posed serious challenges to African socioeconomic development in general and higher education in particular. Virtually all views on brain drain dwell on the magnitude of the problem with limited perspectives on how to contain it. It has always been the case that the burden of addressing the challenge of brain drain has fallen on the losing countries.

Channeling to their home countries a certain portion of taxes already being paid by migrants, for the explicit purpose of higher education and research development, is a new frontier. This uncharted territory is, of course, predicated on the political goodwill of host governments.

Channeling tax monies of migrants, if implemented, has a tremendous potential benefit for many African universities. This proposal advocates the channeling to home countries (a percentage of) the host-country tax money *already* being paid by migrants.

RELEVANT PRECEDENCE?

The success of this initiative depends heavily on a strong political will and a sympathetic leadership. A major lesson can be drawn from a relevant initiative undertaken recently by France. In a laudable measure, which has around 70 supporters, France is imposing taxes on regional and international flights that will be channeled directly to international development aid. This became a reality, despite some resistance, due to strong backing of the top leadership in government. Thus similar initiatives, as “ground breaking” as the one proposed here, could succeed if they have the full backing of those in power.

THE ACTIONS

What, therefore, are the underlying measures that need to be taken to implement this idea? Migrants need to actively lobby their host governments to participate in such an initiative. Their role in pushing the agenda, as taxpayers and members of the host communities, is critical. The role of organizations in host countries—such as the Africa-America Institute, TransAfrica Forum, and the UK-based African Foundation for Development—is paramount.

As potent internal forces, migrant communities need to inspire their host governments and their legislatures. They also need to publicize the idea through major public and academic media outlets. Working hand-in-hand with respective host governments, regional bodies, and home governments, the migrant communities can play a catalytic role in promoting the agenda from within and build constituency around it.

Home-country governments should work closely with their migrant communities on many fronts. They should put in

place conducive policies to intensify the contributions of their migrants. Dual citizenship, for example, is the major one being considered in some African countries.

Regional and international organizations could also play an important role to help realize this initiative. Organizations such as the African Union, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa need to lobby, negotiate, and create awareness in mobilizing resources of migrant communities for development.

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THE CONCERNS

Countries that have been draining talent and skills on a massive scale will find redirecting migrant resources very attractive. It should, however, be cautioned that migrant communities themselves may resist such arrangements for fear of possible conflict with their own interests, employability, or status—directly or indirectly.

It is possible that some nationals may worry that employers—be it government or business—might discriminate against them, when and if they realize that their tax money would not be flowing to the national treasury. It is conceivable that some critical entities in host countries may thwart the initiative by, among other means, overblowing or even misrepresenting the initiative and causing some resistance from the migrants themselves.

THE ISSUES

Such new ideas and proposals raise many questions. How significant is the migrant community (from potential beneficiary nations) to warrant such a policy initiative? What is the nature of political will in respective host countries to push such an agenda forward? Who might be potential political power brokers to help realize this concept? What existing forms of employment, tax, and other issues may pose a hurdle or foster the initiative? How should the matrix of the tax remittance be developed for the diverse nations from which migrants originate? What other forms of existing tax incentives need to be activated? Who should manage, govern, and oversee the funds and resources that may be generated? Who should monitor the flow of funds for their intended objectives? How should the funds be channeled: through existing or new forms of organizations? Which guarantees should be put in place to safeguard the resources from possible embezzlement and mismanage-

ment? What mechanisms should be developed to give migrants a chance to opt in or out of the program? What provisions need to be developed for migrants who assumed citizenships of their host countries to participate in the program? These are a few of the details that need to be worked out.

CONCLUSION

Channeling tax monies to home countries of migrants to help build their knowledge institutions is simply an act of solidarity and fairness. Materializing such a grand scheme would essentially require the goodwill and commitment of host-country governments, regional and international institutions, Diaspora communities, and home countries. ■

Cambodian Higher Education— Growing Pains

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Cambodian higher education has recently been described by different experts in education as “vibrant and lively,” “a cause for concern,” “plagued with difficulties,” and “in a ferment of reform.” Like the six blind scientists describing an elephant, the truth is probably that all are accurate. It just depends on which parts of the sector you are describing and your point of view.

The private sector in general is certainly experiencing “lively” growth, diversification, and expansion to provincial centers, while the government institutions are certainly “plagued with difficulties” such as strangulation by government control and increasing politicization. The quality of many institutions throughout the sector is still “cause for concern,” considering the high unemployment among graduates and the fact that there are still some “universities” that occupy only a single building. But recent moves by the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC) are stirring up a “ferment of reform” throughout the sector.

Cambodian higher education is still in a phase of rapid, largely unregulated, expansion with an estimated 60,000 students in just over 50 institutions, of which 80 percent are private. Most growth is in the private sector. Until recently, almost all higher education institutions were located in the capital Phnom Penh, but increasing competition and huge unmet demand have resulted in rapid expansion of the private sector into provincial centers. Competition has resulted in a lowering of fees and also at least one bankruptcy. An apparent reluctance to apply the regulations outlined in the law for establishment of universities has meant that a number of these institu-

tions are extremely weak, as indicated by unemployment data. Accurate figures are notoriously difficult to obtain in Cambodia, but estimates at present put unemployment among graduates from public universities, one year after graduating, at about 30 percent and as high as 90 percent from the private universities, in spite of the relatively small proportion of students in higher education. Many graduates only get employment in fields unrelated to their study, indicating a mismatch between higher education provision and labor force needs.

Public institutions remain handicapped by centralized ministry control, underfunding, and the fundamental weakness—given that lecturers’ base salaries (US\$75 per month) are still not liveable wages. But they are enrolling increasing numbers of students in courses for which fees are charged, to supplement teachers’ salaries and provide much-needed funds for capital works—blurring the distinction between public and private. In fact, all public institutions are expected to become quasi-government institutions, called public administrative institutions (PAI). But the expectations of greater transparency in governance and management that go with PAI status has led to some resistance to change.

An encouraging sign in the system is the recent activity of the ACC, which is charged with providing an accreditation process for higher education institutions in Cambodia. Formed in 2003, its position within the government, answerable to the Council of Ministers and not as an independent statutory body, was initially problematic—as was the selection of its members, chosen along party lines, and although highly qualified lacking the necessary experience. But with the help of some foreign technical assistance, the ACC has made some positive first steps. The terms “university” and “institute” have been defined, which caused some smaller institutions to change their names to “schools” or “centres.” Minimum standards for a foundation (first) year of broad liberal education have been defined and disseminated. External assessors have been recruited and are being trained by foreign experts from India and Australia. Credit transfer mechanisms have been established. Minimum standards for all higher education institutions are being defined, which will begin to provide a much-needed framework on which more orderly development can proceed.

ANALYSIS

Opinions vary widely, perhaps as a result of the lack of accurate published information about higher education in Cambodia. Pessimists tend to see how far from international standards the present situation is, and the numerous obstacles in the way of ever achieving them. They tend to evaluate the present situation very poorly and give little recognition of the fact that reconstruction of higher education after the disastrous Pol Pot regime only began in 1980, and the oldest private institution is less than 10 years old. They see the increasing politicization of the sector, which threatens to undermine efforts to introduce a more rule-based regulatory environment. For example, recent