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Effects of Brain Drain on Higher Education in Cameroon

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EFFECTS OF BRAIN DRAIN ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN CAMEROON

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INTRODUCTION

International migration of talented people is as old as the early history of mankind. Such movements had always been justified by economic, social and political exigencies depending on the situation and people involved. These very reasons still explain such international movements among talented people today. While such movements did not attract a lot of attention in the past, it became a problem especially from the 1960 s when the trend became lopsided with Western Europe and North America being besieged by talented people from the less developed countries (LDCs). According to Todaro (1985:353) the international brain drain, as the movement later became known, deserves mention not only because of its effects on the rate and structure of LDC economic growth but also because of its impact on the style and approach of third world educational systems .

In the past, such movement included skilled and semi-skilled people. Massive migrations of both unskilled and semi-skilled labour were observed at different periods of the economic growth of the countries of Europe and North America. However, with changes in science and technology, only skilled labour was of high demand in these countries. With the short fall in internal supply, the developed countries had to rely on the LDCs. According to Reuben (1976), as many as 17,154 professionals and technical personnel migrated from LDCs to three DCs (USA, Canada and United Kingdom) in 1963 and by 1972 this figure had risen to 44,843. If one were to take statistics of all Western DCs, the figures would be alarming. This trend has continued up to date and Africa in particular is loosing a lot of skilled manpower to Europe every year. The questions that arise from the above are: Why do talented people leave their countries abroad? What are the consequences of such migrations especially on the educational sector? What policies can be adopted to stem such movements from LDCs to DCs?

The main objective of this rather short paper is to attempt an answer to these questions with particular reference to Cameroon s higher educational sector.

Specifically this paper attempts to highlight in qualitative terms the effect of brain drain, on the University system in Cameroon. In doing so, we intend to

examine in broad terms some of the factors that push Cameroonian intellectuals to leave the country, the consequences of such movements and what can be done to stem this trend.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. The next section takes a brief look at the evolution of University education with particular reference to funding. This is important in order to show how University funding was biased against providing the necessary teaching atmosphere for teachers to do their work. This aspect constitutes one of the push factors for intellectual migration. Section III examines the brain drain concept and section IV looks at the causes and consequences of brain drain on higher education in Cameroon. We conclude the paper in section V with some policy implications to stem brain drain in Cameroon.

II - EVOLUTION OF UNIVERSITY FUNDING IN CAMEROON.

University education in Cameroon started in 1960 with the establishment of the University of Yaounde which served as the lone institution of higher learning up to 1993 when other Universities were created. In terms of organisation, University of Yaounde was made up of three faculties and specialised schools which prepared graduates for the job market.

With an initial student population of 213 in 1961/62, the figure had increased to 10,231 by 1981/82, i.e. twenty years after. This figure increased to almost 45,000 by 1991/92 thereby rendering the main campus too small to contain this population of students. This accommodation problem, coupled with other political and social exigences led to the decentralisation of the University system. Six Universities emerged from the reforms of 1993 - the Universities of Buea, Douala, Dschang, Ngaoundere, Yaounde I and Yaounde II.

In terms of teaching staff, the number rose from 21 in 1961/62 to 544 in 1981/82 (an increase of 2490% in twenty years) and by 1991/92, the year of reforms, the teaching staff stood at about 1518. By 1998 the whole University system in Cameroon had a staff strength of 2019 distributed as follows: University of Buea (259); Douala (249); Dschang (202); Ngaoundere (340); Yaounde I (713); and Yaounde II (237). Initially, about 60 percent of the teaching staff was made up of foreigners, mostly from the Western developed countries. This tendency was maintained up to the mid 1970s when the ratio of Cameroonian staff to the total teaching staff increased steadily until 1993 where almost all the teaching staff were made up of Cameroonians. However, a few foreigners, mostly on technical assistance can be found within the University teaching staff today.

In terms of funding, the government was and has remained the traditional and principal actor towards the financing of higher education. Government subvention to the University budget has been between 94 and 96

percent. The remaining 6 to 4 percent has been from private sources and from friendly countries such as France, Belgium, Britain etc. An indication of public financing of higher education can be seen from the following table which shows total higher education budget vis-a-vis total national budget.

Table 1: Ministry of Higher Education Budget as a ratio
of Total National Budget 1981 - 1997.
(All figures are in Billion frs CFA).

Year	Total State Budget	Budget Allocation to Higher Education	Percentage share of higher Education of higher Education Budget.
1981	412.43	0.447	0.11
1982	494.23	0.585	0.12
1983	648.945	0.725	0.11
1984	751.016	2.677	0.36
1985	876.591	4.025	0.46
1986	858.598	5.188	0.60
1987	630.337	2.856	0.45
1988	551.434	7.797	1.41
1989	513.799	10.939	2.13
1990	541.342	9.947	1.84
1991	613.343	10.947	1.78
1992	487.052	11.885	2.44
1993	451.284	20.257	4.49
1994	549.595	16.901	3.08
1995	638.424	16.127	2.51
1996	892.278	13.029	1.46
1997	1,230	15.479	1.26

Source: Ministry of Economy and Finance, Budget Department.

From Table 1 it seems apparent that enough funds are not being put at the disposal of higher education in Cameroon. For the period under review, budget allocation to higher education has hardly attained a 5 percent mark. After 1993, the allocation was on the decline. This has serious implications on the provision of a conducive teaching and learning atmosphere within the University circle.

Despite the rather small allocation of state budget to the higher educational sector, allocation within the sector, especially during the 1970s up to the early 1980s did not equally favour teaching and research. TFAH (1989) has shown that between 1974 and 1988 more than 20 percent of University budgets were allocated to benefit students directly through bursaries and scholarships. When subsidies on students feeding and accommodation is added to the above one finds a little more than 30 percent of University budget allocated for welfare services to the students alone. Within the same period, total budget allocation to research, acquisition of books and laboratory equipments in the University hardly surpassed 5 percent. This explains why growth in infrastructure and equipment stagnated in the face of a rapid increasing student population. From the mid 1980s many teachers began to complain loudly. Conditions for migration were thus being created from this period onward to the 1990s when most University teachers were eager to leave the country if it were possible. Thus, University funding how much is located to it, how reallocation is being done within the different activities in the University can be said to have been one of the push factors that is responsible for brain drain within the higher education sector in Cameroon.

III - CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Brain drain is generally regarded as the international movement of talented people from one country to another in search of a better life. While this concept did not receive any serious attention in the past, the early 1960s brought it to limelight. Brain drain came to be regarded as the migration of talented people from LDCs to DCs in search of a better life. Gillis, Perkins, Roemer and Snodgrass (1987) give two reasons why international brain drain is abhorrent to most LDCs. First, those who migrate represent one of the scarcest resources in these LDCs. Second, the education of these people has been time-consuming, expensive and heavily subsidized by the State. Such departures to foreign lands therefore becomes very costly to these LDCs. In this case the LDCs completely loose these brains to the DCs and a number of arguments have been advanced for and against brain drain, but this is not the concern of this paper now. All one can say is that the migration of talented people from LDCs to DCs creates a vacuum in the former countries.

Another phenomenon that is being noticed in many LDCs especially those that have been suffering from serious depressions is what we can term internal brain drain. By, internal brain drain here, we are referring to those intellectuals, professionals and other talented people who have been adequately trained to apply their skills, knowledge, energies and talents in their relevant fields but who, for lack of appropriate incentives and motivation, instead employ their skills and talents outside their areas of training and

professions. This phenomenon is a shift of resources within the economy or misemployment and misallocation of resources. Some of the reasons for internal brain drain include poor conditions of work, lack of incentives and motivation, unemployment, public policy which may increase social prestige elsewhere etc. Most of these intellectuals and professionals pretend to exercise their talents in their relevant fields but at the same time devote their time doing other things in order to survive.

Although the latter phenomenon has not been considered as brain drain, it has had some repercussions, on capacity building. The question that arises is, what causes people to migrate or even apply their talents outside their areas of competence and training? We examine this question in the next section with particular reference to the University system in Cameroon.

IV - CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF BRAIN DRAIN ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN CAMEROON

The major reason why talented people migrate to DCs can be looked at in terms of economic and financial factors. Generally there is a wide gap between the income or earnings of workers in DCs and LDCs. People migrate to DCs to take advantage of higher earnings as opposed to low earnings in LDCs. When the University of Yaounde was created in 1960, the mistake made was the uniformisation of the University salaries with those of the public service. There was thus no particular incentive to teach in the University whereas one could easily be in the public service and get appointed to a prestigious post. Between 1970 and 1975, many University lecturers were either abandoning work or moved to other countries. This created a problem in the University. The government reacted in 1976 by instituting two allowances, (technical allowance and higher educational allowance)¹ to the different grades of University teachers. This incentive gave University lecturers an edge over civil servants. People envied to teach in the University. Many Cameroonians abroad returned home to teach in the University. In 1993, these allowances which had remained fixed since their introduction were not only reduced, but University salaries were cut down drastically with those of the civil service. The security services and the military sectors were not affected in this salary cut. This created a greater incentive for teachers to migrate. Indeed, many teachers have left the University system since 1993, particularly in the Science Faculties and Economic Departments. Some of the brightest law teachers of the country have left for other countries.

Even those who have remained have tended to concentrate their efforts on doing other things to survive i.e. the Internal brain drain phenomenon.

To support our view we carried out a survey of 76 University teachers. On how they considered their salary situation, all 76 considered them to be too low. Asked whether if given the opportunity they would move abroad: 68 or 89 percent of them were in the affirmative. On whether if the salary situation were to change (increase) their position would be different, 56 or 73.6 percent of the teachers said that it will depend on the extend of the increase while 20 or 26.4 percent were definite that their position would not change². Asked what measures can be adopted to stem possible migration of teachers, the answers ranged from a complete review of the salary situation to providing good working conditions such as computers officers for lecturers, small sized classes, equipment of laboratories and libraries, among others.

The implication of this small survey is that there is still a high probability of migration among University teachers in Cameroon. The only thing keeping many of them is the lack of opportunities to move.

Generally political factors have also been responsible for brain drain in many countries. Some of these factors are temporary while some are not. Some of these include racial (tribal) distrust, lack of academic freedom in writing and speech etc. The early 1990s in Cameroon were full of political events creation and launching of political parties, elections etc. Some University lecturers were very active in these political events. Some even founded and led political parties. While some belonged to the ruling party, others were in opposition. Some of those in the ruling party were rewarded in terms of promotion and appointments to political positions with the attendant social prestige. Some of those in opposition suffered in terms of promotion, victimisation and discrimination. Many in the latter group left the country for fear of further victimisation and to exercise their academic freedom elsewhere.

As mentioned in section II above, the evolution of the university budget has over the years not favoured teaching and research. The basic teaching infrastructure is absent - no good libraries, laboratories, computers etc. The absence of these basics would even prevent those in DCS from returning because they will find their work frustrating. The survey above has identified this factor as one of those to be addressed to stem brain drain from the university. In general, therefore, the funding of higher education in Cameroon has created avenues for discontent and consequent urge to migrate.

All the above have some consequences on the higher education sector in Cameroon. Some of the effects of brain drain are discussed below.

As mentioned above, the intellectuals of any country are some of the most expensive resources because of their training in terms of material cost and time. The migration of such intellectuals is a complete loss for the countries concerned. Their contribution to the development and growth of the university education system in Cameroon has been completely lost to other nations. Apart from this, their roles as potential leaders both in the universities and the nation as a whole has been reduced.

One of the main problems facing the six universities today is an acute shortage of teachers. This explains why lecturers criss-cross the Universities to teach on part time basis. This has exposed some of them to risks and sometimes leading to low productivity. There is complete lack of some categories of teachers in some Departments e.g. some Economics Departments have not got a single Ph.D holder. This affects the level and quality of teaching and consequently the quality of degree awarded.

V - CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

International brain drain has been a problem to LDCs as a whole and will remain so if some measures are not taken to check the phenomenon. In this

rather short and qualitative assessment we have attempted to identify some factors responsible for this phenomenon in our higher educational system. While financial and economic factors are the main push factors, other social and political factors are responsible for intellectual flight. On the basis of these factors we recommend the following.

First, there is need to increase budgetary allocations to higher education in Cameroon. This will not only assure the provision of basic infrastructure, but will increase the capacity for research. Within the sector itself, there is need for a national reallocation of University budgets to give teaching and research priority.

Second, there is absolute need to ameliorate the conditions of University teaching staff in terms of their salaries, working conditions and social prestige. The Universities should be given the freedom to generate and use their funds to meet their immediate exigencies.

At the national level, there is need to establish some confidence in the future of the country in terms of political freedom and good governance. This will make some of the lecturers who felt insecure in Cameroon to return home.

Above all, the whole University system needs to be reformed to take into consideration national economic and social objectives. Syllabuses need to be adapted to the exigencies of the time so that those who wish to return from abroad and insert themselves within the University system do not find themselves at a loss.

NOTES

1- The technical allowances were as follows :

- Assistant lecturers = 30.000F per month
- Lecturers = 40.000F per month
- Associate Professors = 50.000F per month
- Professors = 60.000F per month.

The respective higher education allowances were 70.000F, 80.000F, 90.000F and 100.000F per month. This shows that on recruitment as an assistant Lecturer, one had 100.000F added to the Civil Service indicial salary, which gave the University teacher an added advantage. These allowances remained fixed from 1976 to 1993 when they were reduced in the face of mounting inflation and devaluation. In addition, there is no distinction between the allowances of a lecturer and those of associate professors.

2 This group of teachers, mostly from Economics and Engineering are determined to

migrate if the opportunities come even with an increase in University salaries

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