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KENYA NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC REVIVAL DAY OF AFRICA (SRDA) CELEBRATIONS, JUNE 28TH 2018, NAIROBI - KENYA

THEME: “The Kenyan Brain Drain and Brain Gain: Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Development

Sub - Theme 4: Policies and Strategies for Turning Brain Drain and Brain Gain into Opportunities for Transformation of Kenya's Economy into a Knowledge Economy

Topic: Streamlining the Higher Education Sector to Curb Brain Drain: Education, Training, and Capacity Building for Solutions to Local Problems

Theory: Policies in the Kenya Higher Education sector have direct negatives effects on Kenya's brain drain by enabling production of graduates irrelevant to solutions to local problems. Provision of solutions to local problems has the potential of creating career opportunities through sustainable and profitable enterprises, all of which curb migration by providing desirable working conditions.

Abstract

The current Kenyan Higher Education system is producing graduates not capable of providing solutions to local problems, denying the private sector the opportunity to in turn birth enterprises that are both sustainable and profitable. Profitable enterprises reward professional staff who build successful careers at home rather than migrate to greener pastures abroad. This study posits that appropriate changes in Kenya's Higher Education policies focused on matching skills trainings with solutions to local problems will go a long way in birthing sustainable and profitable enterprises that will in turn reward the graduates with decent salaries and favorable working conditions. Studies have shown that among the major push-out factors in brain drain is low remuneration and poor working conditions (Cite). The study proposes adoption of an alternative Higher Education policy model that, if adopted, will go a long way in curbing brain drain by matching skills training with solutions to local problems. The study has used the Case Study research methodology by looking at Higher Education policies of several other countries and making comparisons between the economic development effects of those policies with those of Kenya. From the findings of the analyses, the study has prescribed a set of policies that, this researcher is trying to convince the reader, will curb Kenya's brain drain by creating adequate opportunities here at home for the professional cadre.

Hypotheses

Ha1: There is some association between Kenya's Higher Education policies and Kenya's brain drain;

Ha2: There is some association between skills training in Higher Education and career opportunities for their graduates;

Ha3: There is some association between provision of solutions to local problems and performance of the economy;

Ha4: There is some association between performance of the economy and the work environment of professional staff;

Ha5: There is some association between the work environment of the professional cadre and brain drain.

INTRODUCTION

At any Entrepreneurship School, they will tell you that problems present opportunities for entrepreneurship. So, problems are not necessarily bad since they present opportunities. Opportunities are good because they enhance careers and livelihoods, among other vices.

Kenya, like most other developing countries (most of which are in Sub-Sahara Africa), is awash with problems. In context, then, we can now say that Kenya is awash with opportunities (entrepreneurial and otherwise).

There are many ways to solve a problem, just as there are many ways to take advantage of an opportunity. In the context of Higher Education in Kenya, it all boils down to how the country prepares graduate youth to recognize problems and to turn them into career building opportunities.

Some pivotal contextual questions come to mind:

1. How is Kenya positioned strategically to empower its graduate youth to take advantage of available opportunities for career development and advancement?
2. Is the Kenyan Higher Education system in tandem with the country's strategies for preparing the graduate youth for available opportunities?

Assume for a minute that the response to the first question is that we have in place a Higher Education system that adequately prepares college and university graduates for the job market. A follow up question would then be: how effective is that Higher Education system - with recent statistics showing that less than 50% of Kenyan university graduates are absorbed in formal sector employment every year; that it takes a Kenyan university graduate an average of 5.5 years to find employment; and that 2.3 million Kenyan university graduates were unemployed by end of 2017 (Cite)?

From these statistics, the correct response to the first question would then be that the country is poorly positioned strategically to empower the Kenyan graduate youth to take advantage of available opportunities for career development and advancement. There is then a clear mismatch between the skill sets Kenyan colleges and universities are producing and the opportunities on the job market. More specifically, there are specific problems that call for specific solutions that in turn have the potential of creating employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. Kenyan graduates of Higher Education do not have those specific skills, cannot solve those specific problems. Because

the problems remain unsolved, the opportunities they have the potential of creating remain unexploited. The problems persist and unemployment also persists for a large majority of Kenya's college and university graduate youths.

The second question asks whether the Kenya Higher Education system is in tandem with the country's strategy for preparing the graduate youth to exploit available opportunities for career development and advancement. In the context of the statistics on absorption of higher education graduates, the glaring response is: no, we don't.

Logically then, something has to change. Since the problems are not likely to just go away, the only logical thing to do is to change the Higher Education system to be in sync with provision of solutions to the problems. In other words, produce higher education graduates tailor-made for providing solutions to local problems.

What do Higher Education policies and solutions to local problems have to do with brain drain or brain gain? The point is that when our graduates provide solutions to local problems, enterprises buy those solutions. When enterprises buy those solutions, their operations become sustainable and eventually profitable. With profitability, the enterprises are able to pay competitive wages to their staff. Competitive remuneration curbs brain drain.

Studies have shown that Kenya's brain drain takes place primarily at the professional level where people leave their local jobs to go after greener pastures abroad (Cite). They migrate to different countries and regions of the world where remuneration for the same job, career, and profession is considerably better than that at home in Kenya. This study posits that the first point of intervention, then, is streamlining Higher Education policies at home that enable matching of skills training with solutions to local problems. Profitable enterprises that result therefrom enhance the work environment for the professional at home, which includes remuneration. An improved work environment at home does not have to be at par with the destination country to incentivise the professional to stay put (Cite). It just needs to be reasonable in the context of living standards both within the country and globally (Cite). Studies have shown that migration to greener pastures is caused by extraordinary differences between work environments in the originating and destination countries (Cite).

It is, therefore, the perspective of this study that strategic changes in Higher Education policies will curb Kenya's brain drain as it also curbs other vices such as the number and magnitude of local problems and unemployment. Problems that can be addressed through focused skills education, training, and capacity building in Higher Education include Health Care, Education, Agriculture, Hospitality, Entrepreneurship, Technology, Construction, just to mention a few. Whereas all these areas of specialisation already exist in the Higher Education space in the country, policy changes may still be necessary to make sure that the graduate youth has the ability to understand the problem in its local context and is equipped to provide an optimum and lasting solution to it.

A Proposed Higher Education Model:

A Higher Education system focused on producing graduates whose skills are well matched with requisite solutions to local problems would have several stages:

1. The best qualified candidates get admitted into some of the top Technical Higher Education institutions [establishment of Technical Universities and Colleges similar to The Indian Institute of Technology and the Indian Institute of Management (both in India), and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) (in the USA) is assumed];
2. Require rigorous, technical, practical, hands-on curricula in the Technical Higher Education institutions;
3. Require a staggered, graduated program of study with at least three stages that include Diploma, Degree, and Post-Graduate, with varying levels of sponsorships financed through partnerships between the Government (GoK) and Industry:
 - a. A two-year Diploma with a 50% sponsorship;
 - b. A four-year Degree with an 80% sponsorship;
 - c. A six-year Masters degree with a 100% sponsorship.
4. Require a six month Industrial Attachment between the different graduated stages of education (Diploma, Degree, Post-Graduate):
 - a. upon completing the Diploma curriculum, a student goes out to industry on Industrial Attachment for six (6) months and participates in the graduation ceremony only after the Industrial Attachment;
 - b. A select sub-group of top performers (30%) among the Diploma graduates continue to the next (Degree) level;
 - c. The other 70% goes out into industry to start work on employment terms, preferably with the industrial firm that sponsored their training and with whom they undertook the Industrial Attachment;
 - d. The sub-group (30%) that has moved from the Diploma into the Degree program proceeds to the second, six-month Industrial Attachment at the completion of the two years in the Degree program;
 - e. The degree graduates participates in the graduation ceremony upon completing the 2nd Industrial Attachment;
 - f. After graduation, the Degree students are absorbed into industry, preferably by the companies at which they undertook their two (2) Industrial Attachments and which partially sponsored their education;
 - g. A select second sub-group (10%) of top performers from the Degree sub-group proceeds to the two-year Post-Graduate program;
 - h. Upon completing the two-year Post-Graduate curriculum, they proceed to a third six-month Industrial Attachment;
 - i. Upon successful completion of the third Industrial Attachment, the second sub-group participates in the Masters graduation ceremony;
 - j. After the graduation ceremony, they are ready for the work place, preferably with the Industry Partner with which they have undertaken all their three (3) Industrial Attachments and which co-sponsored their Technical Higher Education training.

Summary & Discussions

Brain drain is the disproportionate movement of the professional cadre from one country and region to another. It is a drain because the country of origin has invested large amounts of resources in providing education and professional training for the professionals but is not able to leverage on those sunken resources for economic development due to mass migration. It is brain because of the skills training they have obtained from the country of origin.

Migration of professionals happen due to two major causes, push factors and pull factors. The former are conditions in the country of origin that cause the professionals to leave, while the later are conditions in the destination country that attract them to go to these greener pastures. More often than not, migration is from less to more developed economies, which is rather unfortunate because the beneficiary of the meager resources of the less developed economies become the more advanced economies who reap from where they did not sew, in the migration equation.

In the case of Kenya, as in many other developing countries, among the push factors is the unfavourable work environment that include low remuneration and poor working conditions. It is against this background that the current study posits that a more robust economy would curb brain drain. It posits further that a robust economy will result from economic activities generated by provision of solutions to local problems by college and university graduates. It posits further that local problems abound whose solutions are bound to generate adequate economic activity, likely to produce sustainable and eventually profitable enterprises capable of providing, not only jobs and careers for college and university graduates, but also decent wages and conducive working environments that will curb brain drain.

The study takes the position that the primary cause of Kenya's brain drain is the production of poor quality graduates (by Higher Education policies) whose skills are grossly mismatched with solutions to local problems, denying the local economy the opportunity to birth robust enterprises capable of paying decent wages and providing conducive work environments.

The study recommends a fundamental policy overhaul in the Higher Education sector with the primary aim of matching academic skills with requisite solutions to local problems. Through use of the Case Study methodology, this research effort has looked at and compared the relationships between economic development and Higher Education policies of a few other countries with institutional models similar to that proposed in this study.

The study has arrived at the conclusion that Higher Education policies that enable matching of academic skills with requisite solutions to local problems will allow birthing of sustainable and profitable private sector enterprises capable of paying satisfactory wages and providing conducive work environments that will curb brain drain.