

## Migration and the Knowledge Gap

Societies have over the centuries of their existence survived on the information available to them and how best such information has been interpreted toward encouraging human sustenance through improvements in living conditions. The transnational movement of such former world players as Portugal, Spain and the UK was as much for commerce as it was for new knowledge. In fact the developmental differences that exist among nations can be traced to knowledge disparity and not economic strength. For out of the available knowledge (information), the resources of the environment (society) can be put to productive use to promote the quality of life.

The generation of new knowledge improves the skills and competencies of the workforce recognized as vital to *raising productivity, enhancing competitiveness* and increasing wages and living standards, as those who are educationally disadvantaged are also likely to be economically disadvantaged. The constant generation of new knowledge is therefore a prerequisite for the development of new products and efficient improvement of economic processes for national development.

Historically, higher education has provided a platform for seasoned discourse rather than partisanship, for tolerance rather than discrimination, for a free and open search for truth rather than secrecy or deception. Universities are powerful engines that drive economic development, and they do so because of their role in new knowledge production and innovation.

Unfortunately, post-colonial education aimed at providing the needed knowledge base that ensured Africans can take over the bureaucratic duties of the newly independent states has lingered on for decades and seems to be so entrenched that knowledge acquisition is relevant as long as it can help one secure a good job.

In Tanzania a student once observed; *'people look different to education. For them formal education is the only way to get a good job and get a better life. Therefore, the interest in education is different, more functionalistic... In my country, the question 'how to create knowledge' is not there.'* An observation that is no different for most other African countries.

It has been argued that, more than ever before in human history, the wealth or poverty of nations depends on the quality of higher education. Those with a larger repertoire of skills and greater

capacity for learning can look forward to life times of unprecedented economic fulfillment. Is it surprising that China has emerged as a competitive destination for international students?

The above notwithstanding, research carried out by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and the African Publishers Network (APNET) revealed that the continent is still, like in many other sectors of the economy, a net consumer of knowledge (Wafawarowa, 2006). This unfortunate development cannot be considered in isolation from the overall dependency syndrome.

An offshoot of the policy change towards tertiary education and research institutions has been the increasing privatization of tertiary education which is contributing to the demise of research in Universities and by extension knowledge production. The reprioritization of tertiary education therefore means cut in funds for research. Regrettably the insurgence of private Universities and their search for private funding has rather narrowed their focus on business centred demands of the market, including religious entrepreneurs. Consequently, there has been a mushrooming of private tertiary institutions that are operating in academia strictly for the purpose of profit. Public institutions of knowledge production have been compelled for lack of funds to also venture into the market for private capital by redirecting their resources into providing consultancy services.

Yet, too close a reliance on market forces reduces public benefits, a danger that may be magnified by the globalization of investment opportunities, thereby introducing priorities at odds with long-term national needs.

Another major blockade in the production of knowledge on the continent has been the limited penetration of information communication technology in Africa. It is still not uncommon for over 500 students converging to take notes and reproducing it for award-winning marks. Commenting on Africa's technological capacity, Castells (1998) describes Africa's "technological apartheid" as due to low computer and internet penetration and the lack of a fundamental precursor to computerized networks, namely electricity. Ahwireng-Obeng (2000) thus believes Africa is a "technological wilderness", peripheral to the knowledge revolution.

Consequently the role of higher institutions has segued to that of the production of graduates for the manpower needs of Africa. The actual role of research to African Universities is one of ambiguity. Rapid and substantial increases in student intake (intended to raise funds) and

academic staff has compelled Universities to sacrifice research aimed at knowledge production. The foregoing has served as a push factor in encouraging most professionals who get frustrated with the lack of motivating support for research and refinement of existing knowledge to seek better conditions of work elsewhere.

Notwithstanding arguments made above, the crucial contribution of African intellectuals in the emergence of a counter theoretical standing in global development paradigms cannot be swept under the carpet. Apart from the work of these intellectuals, produced under very difficult political and structural conditions opening up discursive spaces for Africans, they have also contributed significantly towards a broader understanding of the African culture, traditions and general social systems. African intellectuals have made and are still making significant inputs into global discussions on major world issues in the Arts, Culture, and Sciences.

In the '*The post-capitalist Society*' it is argued that the productivity of knowledge is going to be the determining factor in the competitive positioning of companies, industries, and an entire country (Drucker, 1993). No country, industry, or company has any "natural" advantage or disadvantage. The only advantage it can possess is the ability to exploit universally available knowledge. Piocotti was therefore right in postulating that the 21st century will be powered by knowledge (*cognitive capitalism*) as against the 19th and 20th century's king coal and steel.

How then can the obvious knowledge disparity be bridged? To this question emerges the alternative of the country's emigrant stock.

Ghana has lagged behind in proactively mainstreaming the significant connections of her 'high achievers' in the academic and research fields in the diaspora to bridge the knowledge gap between her national and international competitiveness.

Within the context of social remittance, Levitt looked at normative structures, systems of practice, and social capital transfer. The latter relates to, among others, knowledge transfer among former co-locators which can promote networking and collaboration between experts in the country and those in the diaspora, described as *soft power agents*.

Agrawal et al (2003) reinforced the foregoing, arguing on the social capital hypothesis. They observed that social ties which facilitate knowledge transfer persist even after former co-locators separate.

Evidence abound when the role of such diaspora ‘high achievers’ as Dr Osei Darkwa of the Ghana Telecom University, Prof. Kwabena Frimpong Boateng, the famous heart surgeon, Dr. Patrick Awuah of Ashesi etc. towards academic vitality of their various sectors of profession are brought to the fore. The aforementioned continue to exploit their membership in the transnational technical communities to improve the standards of professional knowledge in Ghana.

These high achievers must not necessarily return to have their impacts felt. Researchers like Kwame Anthony Appiah of Princeton University, Dr Ave Klutse of NASA, Rocket Scientist and Complex Systems Analyst, Dr Isaiah Blankson; Dr Ashitey-a Flight Engineering expert; Dr Doku-a Mental Health researcher, the renowned international law Professor-Sam Blay including that of many others could be identified. They will not only be sharing the state of the art in research in their various fields of practice but also mobilise their research connections to bridge the time and space between sending and receiving countries research gaps.

Postulating that the value of skills/knowledge transfer will overtake the value of financial remittances Chukwu-Emeka is therefore preempting sending societies to come to terms with how brain-drain can be overturned to their benefit. Indeed, there is global competition for highly skilled professionals as immigrants. Countries such as the US, UK, Canada, Australia, among others and quite recently destinations such as Germany are adopting surreptitious strategies to update their policies to attract that segment of international migrants with high human capital attributes, while politically ascribing to the ‘3-D’ migrants the responsibility, directly or indirectly, for unemployment, security issues or a lack of social cohesion.

More so, internationally minded corporate institutions are adopting innovative ways of reducing their foreign staff by targeting host country diaspora professionals with cutting edge expertise and most importantly globally competitive work ethics and worldview. Ghanaian professionals in the banking, mining, oil and gas, hospitality, and customer relations industries among others are being sort after from within the diaspora stock with aggressive talent acquisition strategies.

The above clearly has implication on education policy considerations. The disjoint between academic programming in the various Universities, and especially the public Universities, and the corporate world has contributed extensively to this “out of town recruitment” of Ghanaians.

In effect, the corporate world's engagement of the diaspora community serves as a barometer on the success or otherwise of the country's education policy.

In a free and competitive world, Ghana, reported to have the highest emigration rates for the highly skilled (46%) in Western Africa (OECD, 2005), cannot continue to make "waste of tax money and commitment to national development" moral arguments in trying to discourage emigration of the highly skilled. Instead, the country must adopt innovative diaspora measures to streamline and shorten the process of re-engagement of diaspora expertise into the national economy.

Our Universities could exploit the institutional knowledge networks of the Ghanaian diaspora to identify and attract these top notch soft power agents through seminars, web conferencing, lectures or workshops to teach short courses to promote knowledge exchange for domestic consumption and refreshment of the local public discourse.

The engagement of the diaspora for the revitalization of research and knowledge production should therefore not be an end in itself. The diaspora can be an important source and facilitator of research and innovation, technology transfer, and skills development. Such an initiative should envisage a diaspora engagement process that is going to make significant contributions to Ghana's outlined development objectives in the long term. The cases of Korea, India, China, and Taiwan should therefore be referenced not only for academic purposes but also for diaspora policy consideration.

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