

## BRAIN DRAIN AMONG ACADEMICIANS IN TWO HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN ETHIOPIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *To date the issue of brain drain among academicians in higher education institutions in Ethiopia has not been seriously treated. This is, therefore, a preliminary attempt to determine its magnitude as well as to probe into its causes. Accordingly, a study was conducted and the findings show inter alia that the magnitude of the brain drain is quite sizeable and its major causes lie in political and job satisfaction factors. Consequently, its remedies also lie in the amelioration of these conditions.*

### INTRODUCTION

It would be a truism to state that education in general and higher education in particular is quite an expensive undertaking for any country. It is more so for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) of the World. Nonetheless, the most interesting fact is that most of these poor countries, because of their unshakeable faith in education

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as a panacea to all development problems continue investing in higher education despite their meagre resources. Unfortunately, however, the irony is that a significant number of the highly qualified professionals emigrate to the highly industrialized countries of the West. Most do so because of reasons beyond their control and others in search of greener pastures. Consequently, this phenomenon has resulted in brain drain. Ethiopia as one of the LDCs is no exception to this phenomenon.

The purpose of this study is, therefore, to determine to some extent the magnitude of this phenomenon since the mid-seventies with regard to academicians in two higher education institutions in Ethiopia. Furthermore, the study tries to probe into the causes and also attempts to provide suggestions to tackle the problem. It should, however, be noted from the outset that the study does not purport to address the whole gamut of brain drain in other sectors.

It is expected that the study will shed some light on the issue and will also generate sustainable debate on the subject that will eventually lead to some kind of policy prescription. Furthermore, since the establishment of graduate studies in 1978 at Addis Ababa University the need for highly qualified academicians has become more acute than ever before. In light of this, therefore, addressing the issue becomes all the more important and appropriate.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

It seems in order at the outset to clarify the concept behind brain drain. Gosh (preface; 1982) characterizes brain drain or brain migration as a curate's egg - that is a thing with both good and bad aspects. It is true that one can't dismiss brain drain as either a boon or a bane. In fact, there are at least two approaches regarding the issue of brain drain. One approach claims to follow a nationalist model and the other an internationalist model. According to the proponents of the nationalist model (Patkin, 1968:69) human capital is an indispensable factor to a country's economic development and as such they maintain:

The flow of highly qualified manpower results in the loss of the emigrating country. Hence, the external dis-economies involved in the loss of such people is very great ... The loss of strategic manpower affects education, research and training, infrastructure building, creative talent, present and future technology and the entire intellectual climate of a country and, creates a growth-retarding backwash effect. The loss of critical manpower which can formulate and influence policies is a serious loss for a developing-country.

Therefore, according to the nationalist model brain drain is regarded as a process retarding income, welfare and growth by taking away the most needed human capital. In fact, it is strongly advocated that the receiving countries should pay compensation to the LDCS.

On the other hand, according to the internationalist model (Grubel and Scott, 1966:127-133) brain drain is a welfare-income-develop-

ment maximizing a mutual process. The process is said to be beneficial for the sending country as well for the individual professional. Thus, they regard brain drain not as a bane but rather as a boon.

Even though critical views (Adams, 1968:61-69) have been expressed on the two approaches, nonetheless the writer of this paper maintains that the nationalist model appears to be quite fitting for the treatment of brain drain as it relates to Ethiopia, because a poor country can ill-afford brain drain.

As to the causes of brain drain Oteiza (1968:120-134) and Peterson (1969:288-97) maintain that it depends on what they call "push" and "pull" factors, or in other words on endogenous and exogenous factors. According to them the "push" factors constitute economic underdevelopment, political instability, low salary, lack of intellectual freedom, lack of better career expectations; while the "pull" factors include better economic prospect, relative political stability, high salary, and better standard of living. In other words, the "push" factors are the depressing features in the country of origin and the "pull" factors are the attracting characteristics of the country of destination.

Similarly, researchers on the subject such as Man Singh Das (1972:45), Reddy (1974:390) and Vas Zoltan (1976:102) attribute the causes of brain drain to the backwardness of the LDCs.

### CASE STUDIES ON BRAIN DRAIN IN AFRICA

As examination of the literature review indicate that case studies on the subject of brain drain in Africa are quite limited in scope as well as in depth. In fact, the few available studies deal with the problem of brain drain of African students who delay their return after having been sent abroad for further studies. One such study that may be worth citing here is that of Chunkunta (1976) on factors associated with expatriation of American-educated Nigerians. The study included all identifiable Nigerian students in New Jersey and New York. Among the study's interesting findings are the following:

1. Nigerian students generally did not consider unsatisfactory salary structure a sufficient reason to delay their return.
2. A sizeable percentage of the students felt that a change of government from military to civilian would increase the chances of early return.
3. The correlation between fields of specialization and return or nonreturn was positive. For instance, the study indicated a very strong tendency for students in the social sciences to favor return, while those in the scientific and medical fields showed reluctance to return.
4. Correlation between sex, age and return or non-return were respectively found to be totally insignificant.

5. There was, however, a significant and positive relationship between ethnicity and delay in return or non-return. In fact, the study mentioned that the Igbo were the most likely to delay return. (Chukunta, 1976:169).

Another study that was done on Egyptian brain drain may need to be mentioned here probably for its apt remark that may apply as well to Ethiopians. The writer (Ayubi, 1983:432) observes, "traditionally renowned for their dislike of settling outside of their own country, the Egyptians started to become emigrants". This observation may remind one of a humorous joke about Nigerian emigrants in the seventies. An observer, commenting on the issue in the New York Times (Enid Nemy, 1972:20) wrote, "if you go to the South Pole you will find a Nigerian cousin". Whether today the same could be said of an Ethiopian cousin is left to the reader.

## METHODOLOGY

As much as possible every effort was made to get as much data as possible from relevant documents. Unfortunately, however, records kept on follow-up of trainees sent abroad for further studies both at the Main Department for Higher Education as well as at Addis Ababa University leaves a lot to be desired. In the first place, the information available is not at all complete, and further more it is not systematically organized. Therefore the whole exercise was like groping in the dark. Anyhow, an attempt has been made to make

some sense out of the data available particularly from Addis Ababa University.

Moreover, to probe into the causes of brain drain as well to gather opinion as to its solution, a six-page questionnaire based on the literature review was constructed. The purpose was to elicit responses from selected academicians teaching in the two higher education institutions. The sample size was deliberately limited to a group of about one hundred. The rationale was because of their long experience as well as their exposure to life abroad they would be adequate to provide seasoned points of view on the issue. They were, therefore, so to say, the chosen few. The academicians included in the sample were taken from the Addis Ababa University system and from the Kotebe College of Teachers Education. The choice of Addis Ababa University is quite understandable from the point of view of having a system of its own while Kotebe happens to be a major Junior College outside of Addis Ababa University.

At this juncture, a caveat seems to be in order as to why the writer chose to- gather data on brain drain from Ethiopian academicians living at home rather than from those living abroad. It would have been quite appropriate to get information, as they say, from the horse's mouth. Unfortunately, however, besides geographical barrier, it was not found to be practically possible. Therefore, for this seminal study the writer has to rely on data gathered from those at home.

Data analysis is undertaken on a five-point scale (5-1) ranging from highly applicable (5 points), to highly disagree or not at all applicable (1 point).

### MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM

As it has been noted earlier the sources available to determine the magnitude of brain drain among academicians in higher education institutions in Ethiopia have not been easy to come by. Therefore, the writer has to piece together fragmented data so as to make some intelligible interpretation.

Brain drain in Ethiopia started to become a serious problem during the "Derge" regime. A significant number of Ethiopian scholars had to flee the country to save their lives. For instance, the writer after a careful scrutiny of the list of academic staff members in the 1973-75 Issue of the General Catalogue of Addis Ababa University was able to identify that there were at that time 135 Ethiopians of a total of 520 academic staff members. A careful scrutiny of the list further revealed that about half of the Ethiopians had gone between the mid-seventies and eighties. It needs to be noted that the writer had tried to verify this figure with some staff members of the University who happen to know who went abroad, and who failed to return. A further breakdown of those who left in terms of field of specialization gives the following picture:

| Field of specialization | Number |
|-------------------------|--------|
| Agriculture             | 11     |
| Science                 | 10     |
| Education               | 10     |
| Technology              | 8      |
| Management              | 7      |
| Medicine                | 6      |
| History                 | 5      |
| Languages               | 4      |
| Geography               | 2      |
| Economics               | 2      |
| Total                   | 65     |

Similarly, their profile in terms of academic rank is as shown here under.

| Academic Rank | Associate Professor | Assistant Professor | Lecturer | Graduate Assistant | Total |
|---------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------|--------------------|-------|
| Number        | 10                  | 21                  | 25       | 9                  | 65    |

As the above data show those who left cut across academic disciplines. This may as well indicate they might have shared the same reason for leaving the country. Moreover, among those who left there were those who were academically highly qualified as well as experienced. At the same time, there were lecturers and graduate

assistants who may have been sent for further studies, but failed to return.

Furthermore, another clear indication of brain drain at Addis Ababa University is to be found in the 1983-84 academic year report of the Academic Vice President. According to this report 61 percent of the academic staff were juniors. This was because a substantial number of senior Ethiopian as well as expatriate staff members had left the country. The report goes on to state that more than 301 academic staff members had been sponsored for study leaves. It goes on to add that the number that returned so far was only 22. The report in fact laments that this was indeed a very low number (37 percent) compared to those that were sent abroad and were supposed to return before the 1984-85 academic year. Consequently, the report suggests that greater effort should seriously be made to place greater emphasis on the development of the university's own graduate program.

## RESULTS

### The Study Population

A breakdown of the respondents who completed the questionnaire indicates that out of a total of 85 only two are females. The finding, though not surprising, nonetheless, does register a glaring imbalance between the sexes in so far as female representation as academicians in the two higher education institutions is concerned.

In terms of age the overwhelming majority (74 percent) are well over 40. If age means anything then it can at least be assumed that they have long years of experience as professionals. Besides, 60 percent of them have the doctorate degree, while the rest have the master's. This further confirms that they are academically well qualified as instructors in higher education institutions. Moreover, about 75 percent of them are assistant and associate professors and in fact one is a full-fledged professor. This once again is an additional evidence that most of them are quite well experienced. In addition, about 60 percent of them hold positions of responsibility ranging from chairmanship to deanship/ directorship. As far as exposure to the outside world is concerned over 95 percent of them have been abroad for further study.

In general, it can therefore be said that the sample constitutes of respondents who are well seasoned to react intelligibly to the issue of brain drain.

In addition, in order to establish whether or not the issue of brain drain is a serious problem at all for the country respondents were made to react to such a question. Interestingly enough, all respondents not only did they acknowledge that it is a serious issue, but they also said it should be treated as a special problem. Furthermore, to get a feel of the magnitude of the brain drain they were asked how many Ethiopian academicians among those who left over the last fifteen years had failed to return from abroad. Out of a total of 85 respondents 31 of them claimed that at least they recall about

five had failed to return, while the rest said between six and ten did not return.

**Table 1: Highly Applicable Causes for Brain Drain to Ethiopian Academicians.**

| No. | Highly Applicable Causes                 | Highly Applicable |
|-----|--|-------------------|
| 1.  | Political instability in one's country   | 4.7               |
| 2.  | Poor salary in one's country             | 4.6               |
| 3.  | Poor working conditions in one's country | 4.6               |

As shown in the above table according to most respondents highly applicable causes to brain drain among Ethiopian academicians appear to be political instability coupled with economic underdevelopment. Actually, this corroborates quite well with the fact that the major exodus of academicians took place in the mid-seventies and eighties, a period of political repression. It may be true that economic factors may have reinforced their decisions to emigrate. But at the same time it is interesting to note here that Ethiopian academicians had stayed home prior to the 1974 revolution despite the poor working conditions and relatively inadequate remuneration.

**Table 2: Applicable Causes for Brain Drain to Ethiopian Academicians**

| No. | Applicable causes  | Highly Applicable |
|-----|--|-------------------|
| 1.  | Better standard of living abroad                         | 4.5               |
| 2.  | Political persecution on one's country                   | 4.5               |
| 3.  | Lack of academic freedom in one's country                | 4.4               |
| 4.  | Desire to get higher academic qualification              | 4.3               |
| 5.  | Lack of access to professional or scientific publication | 4.1               |
| 6.  | Lack of research facilities on one's country             | 4.0               |
| 7.  | Absence of professional advancement in one's country     | 4.0               |
| 8.  | Life in one country not being exciting                   | 3.9               |

As indicated in Table 2 the other causes of brain drain that respondents articulated as applicable to academicians in general fall under the rubrics of what can be termed as institutional and political infrastructures that are inadequate or absent in the LDCs. The lack of these infrastructures no doubt may have reinforced their decision

to leave for greener pastures. After all, as Gosh (1982) aptly expressed it, "Lilies don't grow in saltwater."

**Table 3: Not Applicable Causes to Ethiopian Academicians.**

| No. | Applicable Causes   | Not Applicable |
|-----|---|----------------|
| 1.  | Relaxation of immigration regulation by some countries like the U.S. for scholars from developing countries | 3.0            |
| 2.  | Feeling that the best minds from developing countries stay abroad to make it there                          | 3.0            |
| 3.  | Getting married abroad to foreigner   | 3.2            |
| 4.  | Lack of commitment to the development of one's own country  | 3.3            |
| 5.  | Desire for international recognition abroad in one's profession   | 3.3            |
| 6.  | Bureaucratic management in one's country  | 3.3            |
| 7.  | Discrimination in appointment and promotion in one's country  | 3.4            |
| 8.  | Absence of challenge and competition in one's country   | 3.4            |
| 9.  | Influence of fellow students on the individual to stay abroad   | 3.4            |

Out of the possible causes for brain drain as identified in the literature review is lack of commitment on the part of scholars to the development of one's country. However, as the finding shows there is complete unanimity by most respondents that it does not at all apply in the case of Ethiopian academicians. This clearly indicates a consistency of view on the part of the respondents who have earlier identified political persecution in one's country to be one of the major causes for brain drain. In fact, taking into consideration that most of the respondents had stayed in the country during the period of political repression they nevertheless don't seem to incriminate the academicians who left the country of lack of commitment to the development of their country. The other causes identified as not applicable to Ethiopian Academicians are to be expected and as such therefore do not seem to be at all surprising.

**Table 4: High Degree of Agreement on Factors that Encourage the Return of Academicians to their Country**

| No. | Factors of Encouragement  | Highly Agree |
|-----|---|--------------|
| 1.  | Maintain constant liaison between scholars abroad and their country         | 5.0          |
| 2.  | Maintain political stability  | 5.0          |
| 3.  | Put and end to political persecution  | 4.7          |
| 4.  | Provide academic freedom  | 4.6          |
| 5.  | Provide interest free loan for low cost housing and/or car, household items | 4.6          |

Among the major factors to which respondents articulated a high degree of consensus in order to entice those academicians living abroad to return home are maintenance of political stability and an end to political persecution. This is a further confirmation that the root causes as well as the solutions for brain drain in the past as well as in the immediate future in Ethiopia lie in the removal of these conditions.

**Table 5: Agreement on Factors that Encourage the Return of Academicians to their Country**

| No. | Factors of Encouragement  | Agree |
|-----|---|-------|
| 1.  | Provide access to professional or scientific publications   | 4.5   |
| 2.  | Create opportunity for returnees to maintain professional contact with their professional colleagues abroad | 4.5   |
| 3.  | Provide short teaching stint for scholars to come back to their country                                     | 4.5   |
| 4.  | Encourage business investment for scholars abroad and returnees   | 4.3   |
| 5.  | Provide information for scholars abroad about job opportunities at home                                     | 4.2   |
| 6.  | Create an organization such as "Friends of Ethiopian Scholars abroad"                                       | 4.1   |
| 7.  | Create conducive environment for their return on their retirement   | 4.1   |

The respondents have also expressed agreement on other issues that help to attract the return of academicians. These can be categorized as job satisfaction factors. Most of these factors call for the existence of institutional as well as economic infrastructures which to date the country lacks. Anyhow, the opinion of the respondents underlines the fact that if academicians are expected to return home then some of these job satisfaction factors have to be made available to a certain degree.

Though not adamantly opposed the single factor to which most respondents expressed their reservation is the offering of dual citizenship to academicians abroad in order to encourage their return. They seem to be saying that if the academicians are truly committed to the development of their country they don't need to be anything else but Ethiopians.

### CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

If there is anything that can be said by way of conclusion is that brain drain among Ethiopian academicians is a function of political and job satisfaction factors. It follows then that the prescriptions for the cure also lie in bringing about improvement in these factors.

To be more specific, taking into consideration the nationalist model to brain drain, which strongly advocates that brain drain leads to a loss of highly qualified professionals who are the sine qua non for the development of the LDCs, and based on the findings of this study, the following may be forwarded as prerequisites for policy prescription:

1. Maintain political stability.
2. Put an end to political persecution.
3. Maintain constant liaison between scholars abroad and their home country.
4. Provide academic freedom.
5. Provide information for scholars abroad about job opportunities at home.
6. Provide access to professional or scientific journals.
7. Relax immigration regulation.
8. Provide interest free loan for low cost housing and/or car, household items.

Besides, the following may be added to reinforce the above prerequisites:

1. Encourage business investment for scholars abroad and returnees.
2. Create an organization such as "Friends of Ethiopian Scholars abroad."
3. Create opportunity for returnees to maintain professional contact with their colleagues abroad.

4. Create conducive environment for their return on their retirement.
5. Provide short teaching stint for scholars to come to their country.

As a final note the writer would like to add that however comfortable life in the West may be for Ethiopian scholars living abroad nonetheless, a house is not a home. As the following Amharic verse affirms:

የእናት አገር ኩታ  
የአባት አገር ሸማ  
ነጠላ አይደለም ወይ የሰው አገርማ

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