

Ghanaian student perspective: Why do students leave? Why don't they come back? Do Ghanaian universities have policies and measures to address the brain drain of staff and students? What do student unions do regarding these issues?

It is no news in Ghana that the country is suffering from brain drain. Its doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers and other professionals have for many years packed up and left the shores of their West African homeland in search of greener pastures.

A World Bank study on census and population, published in a book titled *International Migration, Remittances and Brain Drain*, said that 47 percent of Ghana's college-educated citizens were living abroad.

"For a country with about half of its graduates missing, one has to worry," the report said.

Several sectors have suffered from the exodus of highly qualified workers, who have trained at taxpayer expense but have left over severe economic hardship and low pay, poor working conditions and lack of job satisfaction and usefulness.

Working conditions have improved since the late 1970s, but we believe there is a long way to go.

The official daily minimum wage is just over US\$1, and for many workers, especially in the public and civil service, life can be a daily fight for survival. Many unskilled workers take extreme risks, including walking across the Sahara Desert to enter Europe illegally.

The statistics are stark but abstract, yet the havoc wreaked by the exodus is real and debilitating.

According to Prof. Agyeman Badu Akosa, then director general of Ghana's Health Service, the public health system was virtually collapsing because it was losing not just many doctors but especially its best ones.

"I have at least nine hospitals that have no doctor at all, and 20 hospitals with only one doctor looking after a whole district of 80,000 to 120,000 people," Akosa said.

In our universities, lecturers, especially young faculty members, have been leaving in droves, leaving older instructors to shoulder the burden. Nurses have also been abandoning their posts in high numbers owing to the vast economic, security and socio-cultural differences.

It is obvious brain drain has caused considerable havoc to the development of the country. The World Bank report notes that though remittances and investments in Ghana reduced poverty and were a major source of foreign exchange, the broader implications were "complex."

It said that policies may be needed to raise incomes of professionals in their home countries, but the question one want to ask is this? Do these policies ever exist years after the recommendation of the world bank? Is it a case of lack of stringent commitment to the cause of resolving that perennial challenge?

As part of the problem is the fact that even students on government's scholarship abroad do not return to their home country with the explanation that while abroad, the nation took no interest in their welfare. Grants though meager, come in very late and sometimes not at all, the situation be believe is dire and must be looked at now or never!

Worrying trend in Ghanaian emigration is the loss of high level students and skilled workers. A study of the brain drain by the IMF estimated that by 1990, 15 percent of Ghanaians with tertiary education had migrated to USA and a further 10 percent to other OECD countries.

The economic, political, and social difficulties of the past three decades have created a new diaspora of Ghanaians searching for opportunities elsewhere. As a result, Ghana is often highlighted as a nation struggling with the effects of brain drain. The loss of human capital is a great worry to those pursuing development and growth in Ghana.

Let me state emphatically that, the current remuneration outlay in Ghana and acknowledge that it is unacceptable however, there is sense of hope that the beginning July, government will implement the single spine salary structure.

Curbing the drain! Contribution of students unions.

Bonding beneficiaries of scholarships to contribute to their country on taking up employment. Scholarships will have to be revolving in Ghana; therefore beneficiaries must contribute at a point in time. This will help others and subsequent generations to enjoy from similar schemes.

We have an unfortunate case in Ghana where people who were paid for studying, contribute nothing toward scholarship schemes. I remember one graduate who boasted that he gets paid for every page he reads.

The advocacy for the implementation of the GHANA EDUCATION TRUST FUND (GETFund) have helped train a lot of our literates at home.

The replacement of the SSNIT LOANS with the STUDENT LOANS TRUST have made the equation a lot easier to work out.

Conscientisation of our colleague students and their consciousness of their civic responsibility have helped in curbing the drain eg. Thus on graduation one might have to serve at least three years in Ghana (form of National Service Scheme), before one can leave the country.

Another essential step is passing of legislation to curb the issue

Columnist: Brobbey, Michael

*Alex Young, Global Justice: Tipping the Scales*

WONDER MADILO

NUGS PRESIDENT