

Academic Mobility and Brain Drain: A Kenyan (East African)

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By

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“Education is life!”
Mama Sarah Obama

Kisumu city, Kenya





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Introduction


- This paper deliberately focuses on intra and inter academic staff mobility in the East African region and purposively excludes North – South type mobility
- The AEU Erasmus Mundus program, defines Academic Staff
- Mobility to refer to the training, teaching and research activities undertaken by an invited faculty member
- Human resource mobility however, refers broadly to an organization's ability to deploy staff in a way that enhances productivity improvement as well as improving staff career opportunities.

objectives of academic staff mobility

- Providing academic staff with opportunities for professional and personal development.
- Enabling university to broaden and enrich content of the courses offered.
- Allow students to benefit from the knowledge and expertise of faculty from a pool of universities in the partnership.
- Promote exchange of expertise and experience in welfare delivery
- Enable preparation for the long-term recognition of studies between institutions hence facilitating credit transfer.

In other contexts, Academic staff mobility while retaining some of the objectives listed above tends to place emphasis on cultural exchange and relevance of local circumstances.

This approach stems from an appreciation that traditional knowledge, for long ignored, need to broaden our perceptions on natural resources; increasingly being recognized as ‘ecological civilization’.

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Brain drain

- Brain drain can be viewed to be dual comprising both migration brain drain and Terminal brain drain.
- Migration brain drain is defined as flight of skilled workers or professionals to developed nations
- Terminal brain drain is the death of skilled professionals (Africans) in their countries predominantly due to HIV/AIDS
- Kenya (even though relatively, politically stable over the years), like many of the countries in the East African region,, paints a grim picture of brain drain

Evolution of Public Universities in E. Africa

- At dawn of independence in East Africa, early 1960s, Kenya Uganda and Tanzania shared one public university at Makerere in Uganda with Colleges, Nairobi, Dar
- These colleges soon transformed into National Universities immediately on attainment of self rule .
- Academic staff from the three Universities engaged in numerous joint initiatives in all areas of teaching, research, curriculum development and examinations.
- These conditions provided students with considerable transfer credits opportunities from any one of the universities in any degree program. All went on as long as the regional political union, the East African Community existed.

- With the disintegration of the East African Community in the early 1980's each of the three East African Countries embraced different education policies.
- Kenya shifted from a 7:4:2:3 ie (7 years primary education; 4 years of secondary education; 2 years Advanced level and 3 years university education) to an 8:4:4 system (8 years primary; 4 years secondary and 4 years university undergraduate).
- Even though I UCEA sought of survived , its role in fostering uniformity diminished over time so that each of the initial 3 universities in the region pursued a different calendar further making student mobility a tall order.
- As demand for university graduates grew rapidly in each of the three East African Countries, growth in number of public universities was inevitable

Current Avenues for Mobility

- Due to lack of national and institutional policies, there is very limited academic and student mobility in Kenya and the East African Region.
- The limited avenues that allow Academic Staff Mobility both internally in the country and in the region include:
 - External examination
 - Postgraduate degree programs
 - Collaborative research
 - Sabbaticals
 - Appointments
 - Extra Curricular Activities

External examination and graduate programs

- Major source of current mobility in East Africa for academic staff which also enjoys strong institutional support
- By its nature, is hardly interactive as the period in which this assignment is to be extended is rather limited often extending to just a week or two weeks.
- there have been instances of important spin offs from contacts made during external extermination, leading to partnerships for collaborative research and or joint supervision of graduate students and others.
- Postgraduate student supervision calls for highly specialized knowledge and skill in area of study; the search for supervisors for postgraduate research often extends beyond the student's own university.

Collaborative Research

- IUCEA is a network of public universities in East Africa with a secretariat in Kampala, Uganda. Vice Chancellors of public universities in East Africa form the governing council. One of the objectives is research.
- Currently, the council has two research programs namely; Bio- Earn and Lake Victoria Research Initiative (VicRes). By far, VicRes remains the biggest network of research scientists in East Africa.
- Because of the insistence on collaborative proposals from the E,A region VicRes has been able to significantly increase mobility of Academic staff in the East African Region.

Sabbatical tenure

- All public universities in the E.A have provisions for their Academic Staff to enjoy sabbatical leave for periods of from 3 months to a year or more.
- During sabbatical leave, academic staff are expected to spend this time in a partner institution engaged in scholarly work.
- Both in-country and cross - boarder sabbatical tenure have been actualized in the region but these are few and far from being a common feature among universities
- Although provided for in the statutes in these institutions there is hardly a work-plan and budget for hosting sabbaticals, neither are there programs
- Sabbaticals, though having the necessary potential in enhancing mobility has not realized the desired effect in the E A region.

Prospects for enhancing mobility

- It is clear, there is considerable scope for enhancing mobility, both in-country and cross – border, in the E A region.
- However, for this to happen, a culture change has to be embraced for regional, national and institutional repositioning of the academic staff mobility agenda.
- Define what importance to be given to staff mobility and relate it to mission delivery, e.g can it be part of the criteria for ranking
- Is revitalizing National and Regional Mobility Programs an option, so as to up-scale the collaborative IUCEA- AAU-DAAD visiting lecturer program.
- Is it not opportune for the IUCEA / AAU to influence policy so that sabbatical leave can have work plans in universities in the region.?

Academic Staff Mobility and Brain Drain

- Kenya (E A) is at the core in numbers of skilled Africans leaving Africa for better jobs and other opportunities abroad
- A country with relatively high educated levels dying of HIV/AIDS on the continent
- Hence experiences high impact of both migration and terminal brain drain.
- Out of the 1 Million Kenyan's in the developed world about 40% were drawn from universities and research centers in the country.
- This demonstrates a significant brain drain for a country struggling to achieve the desired thresh hold number of professionals per capita for the population.
- Lack of adequate salaries, poor policies and working conditions were the main reasons for this brain-drain.

Wild beast migration, Serengeti- Mara



Wild beast Crossing the Mara



Thank you

