

Brain Drain

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Abstract- Brain drain is defined as the migration of health personnel in search of the better standard of living and quality of life, higher salaries, access to advanced technology and more stable political conditions in different places worldwide. This migration of health professionals for better opportunities, both within countries and across international borders, is of growing concern worldwide because of its impact on health systems in developing countries. Why do talented people leave their countries and go abroad? What are the consequences of such migrations especially on the educational sector? What policies can be adopted to stem such movements from developing countries to developed countries?

This article seeks to raise questions, identify key issues and provide solutions which would enable immigrant health professionals to share their knowledge, skills and innovative capacities and thereby enhancing the economic development of their countries.

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to provide the reader with an in-depth analysis of the “Brain Drain” phenomenon and its implications for Caribbean countries. The “Brain Drain” I am referring to is the idea that there is currently a significant increase in the migration of highly skilled and higher educated Caribbean natives to more developed countries. The idea behind the “Brain Drain” is that when these persons migrate, there is a shortage of persons remaining with the ability to adequately develop the Caribbean countries. The developed (receiving) country gains extra skills and resources from the migration as it continues to become wealthier. On the other hand, the developing (source) country loses highly skilled manpower and human capital and inevitably becomes poorer.

This paper is divided into sections. The first section will present a thorough definition of the “Brain Drain” phenomenon and discuss reasons why it has become a popular topic of discussion among intellectuals and scholars around the globe. In this section, I will also present specific statistical information about the effects that the “Brain Drain” is said to have on the Caribbean. I will consider some of the methodological concerns we should bear in mind regarding the

statistical data presented about the “Brain Drain.” In the next section I will present some of the arguments from scholars and researchers who do not equate the international migration of highly skilled natives to “Brain Drain” as well as rebuttal arguments presented by those who assert that the “Brain Drain” is in fact legitimate phenomenon. Finally, I will end by discussing some possible solutions to the counter possible effects of the ‘Brain Drain’ on the Caribbean and show the importance of moving from a mindset of “Brain Drain” to one of “Mutual Gain.”

II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to analyze human capital flight, or brain drain, within the Haitian Republic. There are differences of opinion in how scholars define and measure brain drain, or aspects of brain drain. I will be analyzing the internal potential causes of migration including natural disasters, political turmoil, and the education systems. My goal is to see if it is possible to pinpoint brain drain to one event or multiple events. I want to know how brain drain affects Haiti because of the perceived negative effects that occur as a result. I will seek to answer two questions within this study: (1) what are the internal factors that contribute to brain drain? (2) How has brain drain impacted the overall political, economic and educational development?

III. WHAT IS THE “BRAIN DRAIN” AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TODAY

The idea of a “Brain Drain” suggests that there is an unequal distribution of the advantages and disadvantages of global migration. The source countries seem to bear most of the losses and in their estimation, have yet to be adequately compensated for the net contributions their natives have made to the receiving countries. The term “Brain Drain” is not without controversy and there are some scholars, such as David Hart (2006), who prefer to use the term “High Skill Migration” as opposed to “Brain Drain.” According to Hart, High Skill Migration (HSM) is the migration of persons with increased levels of skill and education who, if they stayed could contribute significantly to the development of the country. But problems arise when we try and differentiate between high skill migration and general migration or low skill migration. There is no universal standard applicable to every country with regard to who should be considered highly skilled. The reality is that not all migrants provoke an equal level of loss of human capital.

The only separating factor (and a very subjective one at that) between general migration and HSM or “Brain Drain” is that in the “Brain Drain,” there is human capital, skill and expertise that move with the migrant.

Furthermore, those that leave are likely to be from the middle and professional classes and tend to be educators, health care workers, scientists, engineers, professors and political reformers. In the source country, high skilled migrant workers are also distinguished from less skilled migrant laborers by the higher salaries they receive. As I stated previously, the source countries need these skilled, educated workers in order to develop. At the most extreme end of the analysis we could say that the working classes in these countries devote time, energy and resources into educating these people who in turn migrate and leave them to fend for themselves. As such, it becomes evident that some people’s freedom to travel and obtain financial well-being is obtained at the expense of their countrymen’s freedom from hunger, homelessness, poverty and preventable diseases.

Smaller, less developed and poorer countries are most likely to experience this flight of human capital. For example, many of the High Skilled Migrants going to the U.S. are not from countries affiliated with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). According to the National Science Foundation, approximately 70% of the U.S. science and engineering workforce are from non-OECD developing countries. The countries in the global

North that benefit the most from the “Brain Drain” do not have a problem acknowledging that it exists, but they do very little to correct it.

In order to understand how the “Brain Drain” happens, we must spend some time discussing migration and the reasons people leave their home countries in the first place. The reasons many Caribbean natives go abroad and fail to return home fall within two categories often referred to as pull and push factors. Push factors are circumstances or events in the home countries that result in persons leaving.

IV. Does the “Brain Drain” truly exist?

One of the earliest arguments against the concept of the “Brain Drain” was the “Emulation Model”. According to this model, the migration of skilled and educated persons results in those remaining in the source country demanding higher wages and better education. In this sense, the want their countries to emulate the conditions in the receiving countries. Thus, skilled and educated workers who remain in the source country will engage in productive and positive activities that will enable them to receive higher wages that reflect the wages in the more developed countries. Also, the prospect of migration encourages those who remain in the source countries to obtain higher education as they attempt

to receive higher compensation. As a result, more persons enter universities and the demand for building more higher education institutions increases.

Another argument suggests that even when the migrants don’t return home, the knowledge they acquire often does. Those who argue from this standpoint sometimes posit that some source countries may even be better off if the highly skilled migrants never come back. This is because in the developed countries, they can learn specialized skills and acquire expertise training that they would have probably forgone had they remained in the home country. As communication channels improve, it has become easier for these migrants to share their newly acquired knowledge with those at home. The “Brain Drain” then becomes a sort of legitimate export industry. The source countries provide their citizens with the foundation knowledge and resources, and then they export them to developed countries. In turn those who migrated send back remittances and newly gained knowledge. As a result, it may be more of a mutual gain than a “Brain Drain” as the increase in knowledge and technology will eventually diffuse to the source countries. Many of them are unemployed and without this source of financial support, may have been homeless, hungry or could have otherwise resorted to crime and violence for a living.

Opponents to the “Brain Drain” phenomenon further reiterate that it is nothing new, since for years, the Caribbean has been exporting people for jobs. For example when the Panama Canal was being built many Caribbean workers went to Panama to get jobs in the construction of the canal. Also during the Second World War, many Caribbean countries were still colonies and many citizens left to fight for Britain, work in construction as well as in health services. And even during those time periods, the migrant workers sent money back home.

V. WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT THE “BRAIN DRAIN?” (POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS)

It is imperative that Caribbean countries remove or minimize the push factors that contribute to the departure of their citizens. Governments must now become proactive and stop trying to control the people who already left; they can do little about that. Instead, it would be better for them to shift their focus and start finding ways of improving the country for the people remaining as well as provide incentives for people to stay. Restricting migration is impractical since any severe restriction on migration infringes on basic human rights. Furthermore, severe restrictions on migration will only serve to fuel discontent and illegal activities.

Economic and social development should not be depended upon to stop the “Brain Drain” altogether, but it will make tremendous strides in reducing the problem. Three of the main reasons people leave their home country are: to receive higher incomes, to capitalize on better career developmental opportunities and to gain a greater degree of freedom.

Another proposed solution is that source countries only send students abroad when the subject they want to study is not being offered at home. However, the source country will have to ensure that when these students return home; their newly acquired education can be put to good use.

Another possible solution to the problem is to make migration more difficult. In other words, there need to be policies put in place that would make permanent migration a less attractive alternative.

VI. CONCLUSION

The “Brain Drain” is the preponderance of the migration of highly skilled and educated persons from poor, developing and less industrialized countries to richer, more developed ones. This paper explored the connection between the current globalization paradigm and how it is contributing to this renewed interest in and revitalization of discussions about the “Brain Drain.”

The Caribbean has most recently been one of the most significantly affected areas with regards to the loss of human capital. The paper presented some alarming statistics about the Caribbean including the fact that the highest percentage of educated persons entering the U.S. come from the Caribbean. Not surprisingly, the Caribbean also receives the largest number of remittances from developed countries. It also looked on some of the methodological concerns regarding the statistics on the “Brain Drain” and the need to be careful when formulating conclusions.

I presented some arguments by those opposed to the concept of “Brain Drain” including the fact that remittances could be a sufficient compensation. There was a discussion of the need to be wary of falling into the trap of victimizing the countries in the third world and blaming their demise solely on countries in the west. Instead focus should also be placed on assessing factors in the home countries that encouraged persons to leave. I also discussed some of the rebuttal arguments that strongly suggest that the “Brain Drain” is indeed a very real phenomenon and that remittances alone are not enough. An important economic question is whether the cost of production, that is, the cost of educating people in the source country is justified by the amount of capital gained through remittances. Finally, I ended with discussing some conclusions to the

“Brain Drain” and discovered that the best solution is for developed countries to find ways of compensating the less developed source countries whereby moving towards mutual gain.

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