

From job-seeking syndrome to emigration syndrome: can creating job creators halt the drain?

Background: Youth emigration has of late been a phenomenon of growing significance in Sub Saharan African (SSA) development drive; and the primary motive perceived as economic. With current labor market strain, poverty and exclusion, South to North graduate flow has been conspicuous especially with perceived absorption capacity of host countries. The alarming rate of youth emigration and disposition in the region has often been referred to as the “African Exodus”. Since the economic downturn of the late 80s in Cameroon, and the subsequent squeeze in public sector employment, graduate emigration and dispositions have been critical. Although expansion of employment opportunities has been far below graduate demographic growth, low entrepreneurial culture has aggravated job-seeking syndrome, with consequent maladjustment in the native land. Young people now make up a large part of an urban growth phenomenon as they migrate internally and externally in search of employment, education, and a perceived chance for a better life (Lane, 2008). Consequently, young graduates develop emigration syndrome as a consequence of labor market entry difficulties. It is therefore a paradox that despite the immense riches of Cameroon, graduates are unable to exploit the resources and instead conceive emigration dispositions.

Graduate emigration syndrome is seen to have been aggravated in Cameroon by the 1993 University reforms that decentralized university education with explosion of student and then graduate population. Job entrants experience high internal mobility rate in job search, characterized by long length of school-work transition that is anxiety-provoking. With a strong feeling of desperation and destitution in a life course, graduates develop western mentality with strong emigration disposition. The economic exclusion of graduates, a hindrance to life course in terms of citizenship participation has been perceived as a critical push factor in greener pasture search and emigration predispositions of school leavers.

Perspectives and conceptual framework: It is evident that the main concepts of the paper- job seeking syndrome, emigration syndrome and job creators have been appreciated differently in other contexts. But in the current paper meanings have been attributed in the manner that the concepts will be explored. We define job-seeking syndrome as a feeling of graduate dependence on available jobs as a sole source of sustenance, and persistent mobility in job search. Emigration syndrome has been perceived as the internalization of foreign mentality, belief and desire of better opportunities and life style, and the expression of emigration-relevant behaviors. Emigration disposition is the persistent tendency to quit native land for economic motives, and the drain refers to physical and mental flight in terms of individual and societal losses. In context, creating job creators means priming entrepreneurial mindsets as a measure of halting graduate drain through self-employability competence. This is the primary responsibility of the tertiary sector as a mechanism for the production of middle-level manpower.

This work builds on conceptual models that have been developed to understand the human capital development strategies and brain drain. Ozden (2006) observed that among

the most hotly debated issues is the migration of highly skilled and educated people, the so-called brain drain from developing countries to developed countries. The drain in energetic resources is a rape on the wealth of nation necessary in private sector development and exploitation of dormant resources. Human capital flight has therefore been blamed on deficiencies in entrepreneurial mindsets and drive towards self-employability and the development of the private sector in developing nations. This justifies that regrets of the World Bank (2003) that Cameroon University system had been preparing students with full degree courses, but with only limited links to the needs of the labor markets. Students are skilled as job seekers and not job creators and justify excessive mobility in job search and then the job-seeking syndrome. Analyzing migration motives in Cameroon, Fleisher (2006) found that young migrants to the West intended to improve educational status for better career opportunities and employment; thereby indicating training weakness in the local education system as a push factor. Such excuses foster the foreign mentality and emigration-relevant behaviors. Examining the phenomenon of “non entrepreneurial majority” Motts (2002) observed that 90% of African youths are job seekers; justifying the need for demand-driven entrepreneurial skills. This brings in the concept of system-wide entrepreneurship education (Streeter at al., 2002) that extends the acquisition of entrepreneurial competence to non business majors. It is presumed that this will build competence top develop local resources and put Africa has a wealth of resources and effective management would seem a logical way of alleviating human hardship, poverty and creating wealth. Generic skills development that creates job creators will put graduates on hold in their native land to exploit waste riches as many graduates paradoxically suffer from brain waste in the North.

Problem Statement: evidence that employability opportunities in a country with untold riches but underdeveloped private sector are highly limited, and this has aggravated graduates’ pathology. Fracture entrepreneurial education and low self-employability skill base has been observed as critical factors in the job-seeking syndrome and sources of insecurity, instability and mobility. Again, inability to secure employment in the local labor market has influenced alternative survival thinking, accompanied by foreign dreams that are consequently crowned by emigration disposition and actual migration. The paper intends to explore two fundamental questions: Does job-seeking syndrome lead to displacement among graduate population? Can the development of job creation capacities halt physical and mental drain of graduates? The main purpose of the paper is to demonstrate that the creating job creators and not job seekers will moderate job-seeking syndrome and then migration dispositions of graduates and consequently put a hold on the drain.

Methodology and data: This paper is just part of a broad based study designed to explore entrepreneurship education offerings and relationship with the development of job creation capacities of Cameroonian graduates. The study is a survey approach that adopts an exploratory investigation using descriptive and correlation analysis. The population of interest constitutes undergraduates and graduates of business and non business majors in State Universities. This preliminary analysis, which is the interest of this paper, is derived from secondary data sets obtained from recent studies of the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), the National Employment Fund (NEF) and the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP). Data obtained from these sources, using a mixture of documentary analysis and observations, have been used to respond to the

principal questions of the investigation. Analysis is made based on observations from current provisions of Higher Education system, stress in job-seeking and emigration dispositions of young graduate population. This involves literature on policy agenda and strategies that take into account conceptual and theoretical contributions to the domain.

Preliminary results: The paper demonstrates how maladaptive human capital upskilling strategies can frustrate job entrants and foster human capital flight in Cameroon. Graduate unemployment ranks top on the list of unemployed school leavers suggesting deficiency in labor market entry capacity and graduate vulnerability to migration syndrome. Despite government rhetoric entrepreneurial competence strategies have not been enshrined in State's policy as a core value that can foster productive capacity, moderate job-seeking syndrome and migration disposition. Related entrepreneurship offerings are theoretically based and void of experiential learning essential in generating demand-driven generic skills that can halt the drain. Analysis therefore suggests that job-seeking syndrome can be a critical factor in emigration syndrome since the primary motive of graduate mobility is perceived as economic survival strategy.

Policy recommendations: Results from this investigation form not only the basis for further study but also a platform for relevant policy recommendations. According to the International Labor Organization (2006) the number of young labor market entrants in Africa outpaces the economy's ability to absorb them, resulting in high youth unemployment and underemployment. The need for Private sector Development (PSD) has often been expressed and this can only be achieved through the development of job creators especially in the tertiary sector. With regards to the diploma disease, job-seeking and migration syndrome, enough rhetoric has been observed from policy circles with just cosmetic actions. Accreditation of entrepreneurship offerings will foster a culture of entrepreneurship in graduates and make this population motivated, stable and oriented towards job creation and consequently reduce the exodus. The government needs to encourage and support research activities on human capital development and flight dispositions in order to better inform policy design and implementation. Creating job creators through the development of entrepreneurial culture should be considered a critical factor in reducing emigration dispositions and human capital flight. This holds with the view of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2006) that young motivated and inspired citizens are agents of change with the potential of taking a leading role in tackling Africa's development challenges for themselves, their families and the society. It is high time the government collaborate with relevant stakeholders like the like Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and alternative rather than the routine reactive measures in priming entrepreneurial capacity as a measure of job security and a response to emigration syndrome. This will also check brain waste since most graduates are trained in the South but hardly employ acquired knowledge due to mismatch with labor market requirements of host countries. The work also highlights the critical role of psychology in moderating the job-seeking and migration tendencies through mental and behavioral upskilling strategies and systems innovation.