

UNDERSTANDING THE BRAIN DRAIN PHENOMENON: “KNOWLEDGE MUST BECOME CAPABILITY”

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Africans have learned a lot since their independence and have had ample time to dwell on the challenges of protecting African interests against foreign threats and to enhance Africa in the 21st century. Most studies on Brain Drain emphasize its economic causes and focus on the damaging economic and social effects on the African society. Yet those studies assumed implicitly that the well educated Africans are economically better off in western countries than in Africa. This assumption is however not corroborated by facts. The simple observation of the social realities in Western countries shows that most well educated Africans suffered from unemployment and from social exclusion.

There are in fact two perspectives on the brain drain phenomenon in Africa. The first perspective –which can also be termed as a western perspective- emphasizes mostly the negative aspects of the brain drain and use the discourse and practices on brain drain as an anti immigration tool. The second perspective evolved around the idea that the brain drain phenomenon discourse and practices can be used as a productive tool to catalyse and transform the whole social fabric in Africa and to transform knowledge into capability. The whole concept related to the second perspective evolves around the idea of use intangible assets - understood as “collected and interpreted data” and as “what is inside the skulls of Africans” - to generate value and meaning social change in our African societies. To meet this objective we need beyond the numerous pressing short term operational priorities, a long term strategy with a coherent doctrine, strategy, structure and organisation.

To have a certain sense of the challenges raised by the brain drain phenomenon, one must understand the true nature and origin of the brain drain phenomenon. The real origin of the brain phenomenon can be expressed with the words of John Boyd as follows:

Boyd “*A discourse on winning and losing*” suggests that the way to win is to operate (that is to observe, get oriented, decide and act) more quickly than an adversary. Ways to do this include depriving the adversary of essential information, overloading the adversary with puzzling or difficult to interpret information, using the adversary “genetic heritage” or “cultural tradition” so that the enemy is self disconcerted or self deceived, frustrating adversary actions or denying the enemy feedback or accurate feedback on the consequences

of action taken. All of this is designed to “generate uncertainty, confusion, disorder, panic, chaos...” and shatter cohesion, produce paralysis and bring about collapse”.

What Boyd suggests is that the real province of conflict and the real battle field of modern phenomenon is the mind. One direct effect of this view is that every strategy aimed at reversing and channelling the brain drain phenomenon must learn and develop strategies how to win the hearts and minds of Africans. Moreover this approach suggests that as far as the political and economic activity is a human activity, power is a function of the informational organisation.

Based on this approach a strategy, doctrine, structure (financial and operational) and organisation are proposed to understand and channelling the brain drain phenomenon for African interests. The Philosophy of this approach is to create knowledge on Africa and Africans and to transform it into capability. This implies the overcoming of the extreme poverty of imagination to which routine and education has ever led.