

Will young Africa survive the impact of Ageing Europe? Analysis of the Uncertainty

Context

Africa's exceptional young age structure, and associated high population growth for the foreseeable future _ due to *momentum*, endogenous from up to now, high fertility_ has in the past been positively perceived, by this author, as a unique global asset, because of the potential, indeed already, labour demand in ageing-induced increasing shortages elsewhere, particularly in developed countries (DCs), notably Japan and neighbouring Europe: consequences of protracted fertility decline. It is that ageing (increasing elderly population but decreasing labour force entrants, the (care-source) tax base), is viewed with awe, because of its doomsday threatening consequences: economic stagnation (thus consequent political and social decay) due to shortage of labour with aggravating associated costly ageing labour force and less (young) skills endowment for R&D, increasing burden of care of the increasing elderly (pensions crisis and high cost 'high-tech' health care). Worst are unpalatable, or of limited impact, internal reforms: raising taxes, retirement age and labour force participation, and inducing fertility increase with details of assuring a good *quantum* through early 'starting' *tempo* effects. Thus immigration, though sensitive and dreaded, and has caused heated debate, is inevitable –indeed beneficial.

However _and this is the focus of this paper_ prospects of benefits of emigration are uncertain, probably negative_ for sending countries, particularly least developed, thus little prepared Africa, because of the brain drain of its scholars and professionals on whom scarce resources have been spent for training; worst, 'those leaving are the very people that African countries need to develop their economies, and once gone, they are unable to pass on their skills to next generation of Africans - a double cost to the world's poorest continent'. Yet the

issue gets little attention, seemingly for benefits from remittances and easing-up of population pressures.

Data and Methods

Two data and information sources are used: first, the United Nations' most recent 'World Population Prospects: 2004 Revision', current years and projections to Year 2050. The difference in age structures, notably Africa's young versus Europe's old provides a basis for the argument of labour plenty/shortage respectively. Second, a literature survey of the state of the art, views on pros and cons of immigration is made, generally, and the African brain drain in particular.

Results

Serious ageing, as baby boom generations go into retirement ages _adding generally early retirement especially among this group_ establishes dire/heightened need for manpower of all skill levels. Widely accepted is shortage of skilled people, even though immigration incites debate: strangely but interesting, it is opposed by scholars in ageing regions but favoured by the business community and government, but the latter understood, as they are the ones knowing 'where the shoe pinches'; even scholars' reluctance, as increased supply will do away with the 'skills premium' arising from labour shortage.

Facts on the ground show vividly both supply, and more importantly demand, that these immigrants are very much needed. Still selected immigration, of skilled personnel (managers, professionals, scientists), and already practiced e.g. in Canada, will intensify over time. This is where Africa, not just will, but already is suffering: from the brain drain that is.

Analyses based on the authoritative International Organisation for Migration (IOM) reports, show increasing massive brain drain of African experts: the annual

loss was 70,000 in 2003, having risen from 20,000 in 1990. Other sources put as follows:

- BBC News Online March 14 2003: The so-called "brain drain" has seen more than 40% of African high-level managers and professionals desert their home country for opportunities elsewhere.
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- BBC News 17 Oct, 2001: A new report says Africa has lost a third of its skilled professionals in recent decades and it is costing the continent \$4b dollars a year to replace them with expatriates from the West.

The author cites a number of Tanzania examples. General is the Tanzania medical and academic exodus to southern Africa; and here there is an interesting dynamic: they replace the southern Africans, notably nurses and teachers 'raided' to Britain.

The unskilled drained are uncountable, e.g. the 'boat people'. But they are not unimportant: an article talks of Europe thriving on the backs of the unskilled immigrants.

Concern, indeed outcries, are expressed in many quarters. Nothing can express it like South Africa's Education Minister Kadar Asmal: British recruiters are "raiding" the country's resources at a crucial time in the nation's development.

And the greatest iron of all: African governments' ready acceptance of expatriate replacements for the 'departed'. Perhaps the concern should not be the huge cost of these _after all it is normally in form of technical assistance from DCs, though meant to employment to these donors' citizens (it is their taxpayers money!); the real problem is the questionable quality/expertise of these expatriates: it is widely reported of the expatriates understudying those locals they are supposed to train; a title of a book about this is 'Lethal Aid'!

The seriousness of the African brain drain, in terms of how difficult it is and will be to address can be seen on reasons for migration _leaving indeed: it is not simply income; perhaps worst is disregard and contempt of African experts by

the African political oligarchy. One of the speakers at a conference, Dr Sibry Tapsoba, who works for a regional research centre in Senegal, said that, surprisingly, most professionals and graduates were not leaving simply to earn more money: "The first major factor is really the value attached to the contribution of these people. You know that those people who are well trained usually leave because they are persecuted in their own country."

Conclusion

Undue attention is given to immigration to receiving countries who are net beneficiaries, at the expense of sending, poor countries, worst least developed, thus unprepared Africa. Apparently it is because the latter, seemingly will benefit by remittances and population pressure let-up. In actual fact _"the bottom line'_ nothing is worse than that they lose experts (scholars and professionals) _that critical human resources capital_ on whom they have actually used meagre resources _and loans and DCs questionable aid_ to train. Exploration is made of measures to stem the drain, but bleak in the short-run; because, ignorance largely, demonstrated by disregard, consequently low pay, even contempt the African political oligarchies have of their experts _the contrast is their luring in more developed India, China_ augur continued underdevelopment; in other words Africa is bound to remain hewers of wood and drawers of water.