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THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC  
EFFECTS OF  
DIASPORA RETURN.  
THE IOM EXPERIENCE



The original Greek word, signifying expansion and settler colonisation, can loosely be compared to the latter European (especially British, Portuguese and Spanish) settlements of the mercantile and colonial period. However, this meaning was “hijacked” to describe a forcible dispersal of a people and their subsequent unhappiness in their country of exile. Nowadays, with the increased use of the term to describe many kinds of migrants from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Cohen, 1997)<sup>1</sup> a more relaxed definition seems appropriate:

### *Common Features of Diaspora*

1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
2. Alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
3. A collective memory and myth about the homeland;
4. An idealisation of the supposed ancestral home;
5. A return movement;
6. A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time;
7. A troubled relationship with host societies;
8. A sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries;
9. The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in tolerant host countries.

Highlighting their most important characteristics, using a qualifying adjective, Cohen (1997) created a simple means of typologizing various diasporas giving also central examples, as follows:

- Victim diasporas** (victim origin is either self-affirmed or accepted as determining their essential character):
- Babylon for the Jews;

- Slavery for the Africans;
- Famine for the Irish (1845-1852);
- Genocide for the Armenians (1915-16), when the Turks deported two-thirds of their number to Syria and Palestine;
- Formation of the state of Israel for the Palestinians.

**Labour and Imperial diasporas** (diaspora caused by the expansion from a homeland in search for work or to further colonial ambitions):

- The Indian indentured workers deployed in British, Dutch and French tropical plantations from the 1830s to about 1920;
- The Italians who made the transatlantic crossing, mainly to the USA and Argentina late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries;
- Turks and North Africans who entered Europe in the period after the Second World War;
- All the powerful nations-states, especially in Europe, established their own diasporas abroad to further their imperial plans. The Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, German, French and British colonists fanned out to most parts of the world and established imperial and quasi-imperial diaspora.

**Trade diasporas** (diaspora caused by the expansion from homeland in pursuit of trade):

- the Chinese traders;
- the Lebanese (seventeenth-nineteenth centuries).

**Cultural diaspora** (created bonds of the imagination without the formal features of (physical) migration and the territorialization of identity):

- The Caribbean.

Recent profound changes in the political and economic world order have generated large movements of people in almost every region (Van Hear, 1998).<sup>2</sup>

## IOM RETURN PROGRAMS: AN OVERVIEW

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**Return migration** may be defined as the process whereby people return to their country or place of origin after a significant period in another country or region (King, 2000).<sup>3</sup>

It is possible to devise a typology of return and reintegration programmes on the basis of numerous distinctions, perhaps the most important of which are between voluntary and involuntary return, permanent and temporary return, and assisted and unassisted return (Koser, 2000).<sup>4</sup>

**Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR)** is one of the many services IOM offers to its Member Governments in the interest of efficient migration management. It aims at orderly, humane and cost effective return and reintegration of asylum seekers, denied asylum seekers and other migrants currently residing or stranded in host countries, who are willing to repatriate voluntarily to their countries of origin. The return process is based on existing and well-tried IOM return and reintegration programmes in Europe and elsewhere, and always comprises: arrangement of travel, post arrival reception, information, referral, and onward travel to the home location and immediate reintegration assistance. It may also include: information and counselling to potential returnees, medical assistance (if necessary) and longer-term reintegration assistance. IOM Assisted Voluntary Return programmes can be divided into four categories:

- a) **Return of irregular migrants in transit.**
- b) **Return programmes generally available to all irregular migrants.**
- c) **Specific return programmes available to certain irregular migrants.**
- d) **Return of qualified Human Resources:** in the context of orderly migration and migration for development, IOM has for many years dealt with programmes for the return of qualified human resources which aim at the social and economic advancement of developing countries, of origin. These are essential capacity-building programmes, that are demand-driven rather than supply-driven.

## Return Benefits

In most cases, assisted return is likely to be a more cost-effective, humane, politically acceptable, and ultimately durable solution than forced return. Where reasonable reintegration assistance is provided, it bridges the gap between return and initial housing and employment, thus considerably enhancing the chances of a successful and lasting reintegration.

## Causes and effects of return migration

King (2000)<sup>5</sup> summed up causes and effects of return migration. He asserts that the causes of return migration are many and varied, and a migrant may decide to return home for a complex of reasons rather than just one.

## ASSESSMENT OF RETURNEES' IMPACT: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

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Under the assumptions that:

- some migrants do actually acquire new skills and
- most migrants make use neither of old nor of new skills upon return

it appears that two potential development resources could be tapped. Firstly, by ensuring the absorption into productive employment of migrants within occupations for which skill scarcities exist in the local labour market. Secondly, by identifying migrants with relevant skill gain, which, when tapped, would constitute an element of technology transfer. A method for identifying skill gains and losses would thus meet a real need.

The **ideal methodology** for assessing skill gain and loss during migration and degree of utilization of acquired skills upon return, as Pedersen (1988)<sup>6</sup> argued, is to directly measure the skills involved rather than using indirect means, all of which could be assumed to be effects of changes in skills and be used as indicators (changes in wages, wage differences between migrants and non-migrants, etc).

Pedersen suggests that an **ideal solution** would be to directly measure the skill gain, loss, and utilization of a random sample of individuals within a given occupation. To do so, we would need to know:

- a) the number and type of skills possessed by each emigrant at the point of departure;
- b) the individual's proficiency level in each skill before departure;
- c) the proficiency in each old skill upon return;
- d) the number and type of new skills acquired while abroad;
- e) the proficiency in each new skill and
- f) the degree of utilization of new skills upon return.

This method would answer the question of "what" is learned or lost; "how well" or "how badly" the skills have been learned or damaged; "how many" migrants incur these gains or losses, as well as "to which extent" new skills are being utilized upon return. Therefore the socio-economic effects of diaspora who return to their homeland.

Having proven that the ideal approach involving direct assessment is not feasible for several reasons, he developed MONISKIL, a low-cost survey methodology able to produce a picture of skill gain and loss by migrants. It was developed as part of Sub-Programme 3 of the Asia Re-

gional Program on International Labour Migration, which was financed by UNDP and implemented by ILO.

This survey methodology is based on a draft prepared in early 1986 and improvements made following two pilot surveys in Pakistan and the Philippines. MONISKIL surveys measure skill acquisition, loss, and utilization through five indicators, which are assessed through structured interviews with respondents from three groups of respondents. Each indicator is measured by using direct or indirect questions, and, in some cases, by combining answers from different groups of respondents. The first three indicators highlight conditions and events during the migration period, while the last two relate to the period following return.

#### Indicators

- Amount of on-the-job and off-the-job training received;
- Amount of on-the-job learning;
- Type of skills acquired/lost;
- Job performance compared to non migrants and
- Degree of skill utilization upon return.

#### Respondents

Group A: Return migrants;

Group B: Employers of return migrants and

Group C: Domestic employers of migrants (if any).

Having determined that skill acquisition does take place and that it, at least in the occupations surveyed (Pakistan and Philippines), outweighs skill loss, the next question is whether it is possible to increase the utilization of these skills.

Assuming that more return migrants would be absorbed into the labour market if employees were aware of job opportunities and employers were aware of the qualifications of return migrants, a solution which improves the functioning of the labour market, according to Pedersen, may be pursued.

## IOM's Assessment of Impact of Returnees

### *The importance of the employers' survey*

In the assessment of the impact of returnees assisted by the RQAN program to return to their country of origin, IOM identified the perceptions of employers as one effective way of measuring immediate "success" of such a demand-driven program.

### *Measurement of Impact: difficulties*

Measurement of impact should recognize many inputs of resources that are expended before change and growth are realized. Indeed impact is deemed to occur when there is a change or growth of the output or enhance capacity within the workplace to produce future output. In impact assessment, special attention has to be given to how far the returnee has extended his/her normal boundaries for the benefit of the workplace.

### *Selection of the most appropriate tool(s) for measuring impact in the workplace*

#### a) Returnee's Performance Evaluation (RPE)

RPE refers to the appraisal performance that the supervisor of the returnee may carry out. RPE measures also how the returnees' job has altered over a period of time. Specific variables: leadership qualities; creativity and critical thinking; innovativeness; introduction of new systems; growth of the organization, etc.;

#### b) Quality Improvement (QI)

QI is the enhanced value or value added to a product or service in order to satisfy customers;

#### c) Projected Cash Flow (PCF)

This is the measure of the expected future cash flow and discounts taking into account risk factors associated with the specific business of the organization;

#### d) Balance Score Card (BSC)

BSC is a model that measures the organization's performance based on the long-term satisfaction of the customer. The tool may help a manager to link today's actions with tomorrow's goals in recognition that companies do not exist purely for financial gains, but for the ultimate benefit of the customer.

### *Techniques employed for acquiring primary data*

1. **Direct observation in the workplace.** The observer is familiar with the situation before and, therefore, able to identify change and growth by observation only.

2. **Interviews (both with the returnee and the employee).** A method of collecting data from a subject face to face by asking questions.

3. **Focus Group Discussion.** Focus group processes, culture, environmental challenges, strategy, and it is directed by a consultant.

4. **Questionnaire.** It is a survey method utilized in the collection of data.

## EFFECTS OF DIASPORA RETURN ON THE NATIONAL ECONOMY'S KEY SECTORS (EDUCATION, HEALTH, AGRICULTURE, ETC.)

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### *The Return and Reintegration of Qualified Nationals (RQAN) program*

The Return and Reintegration of Qualified Nationals (RQAN) program was established in 1983 to assist African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries to acquire and utilize “qualified, highly qualified and skilled African personnel” in their development. It was funded by the European Union in the context of Lome II and III Conventions.

The RQAN program was largely founded around the “brain drain” metaphor - to retrieve African intellectual (human) resources currently deposited and utilized in industrialized economies and expend them in the development of Africa and/or their respective countries.

A unique feature of RQAN was its emphasis on demand for the expertise or skills as opposed to the mere facilitation of African nationals to return to their countries of origin. Emphasis was placed on linking the demand of a particular agency or government to the relevant pool of expertise and skills abroad. This was largely managed by identifying specific job vacancies in the participating ACP countries, and for each of the vacancy, identifying suitable African candidates based in the industrialized countries (i.e. European countries, North America).

**Program’s Main objective:** Mobilizing and promoting the utilization of highly qualified, qualified and skilled personnel in the development of African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries.

IOM assessed the impact of returnees in the workplace, which is to determine, measure, evaluate performance, and contribution of the returnees to the organizations and the countries in which they have been posted.

Out of a total 664 returnees a sample of 433 was chosen from 19 countries. The findings were broad and varied:

1. Most (74%) of the returnees had worked abroad for more than 10 months but less than 4 years.
2. 68.7% of the returnees were in normal operational management of the companies with 47.9% as experts and 25.4% in middle management.
3. In terms of frequency in decision-making, returnees in Ghana, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe made them very often/always.

4. Most of the returnees contributed to the financial growth of the workplace through provision of services that brought income (49.5%) and cost savings measures (18.3%).

5. Almost all returnees (93.6%) transferred both new knowledge, technology and management skills to the workplace and were always/sometimes (90.5%) competent in doing so.

6. The returnees contributed (98.6%) to the learning/growth of the organization in almost all the countries and in all the sectors (97.7%).

7. Contribution to learning/growth was through bringing new skills and technology (24.8%) and transferring (39.8%) the same to the organizations.

8. The self-employed returnees reported that they transferred technological and management skills (79.3%), not only to the organizations, but also to the countries (88.9%) where they were working.

The analysis of the primary data shows that the returnees have had a positive impact on the companies/workplaces they were working for and the target countries. This is an indication of a positive change that could lead to an improved economic performance and development at national level, since they were working in key sectors (education, health, agriculture, etc.) of their economies.

### *Recommendations*

The study/evaluation should be repeated after 2 or 3 years. Impact assessment is a dynamic concept and measuring it at different time, with varied factors, would reduce externalities and other casual effects.

### *The Return and Reintegration of Chilean Exiles from Belgium (1996)*

The program's main objective was to support and facilitate the return of 125 cases of Chilean exiles residing in Belgium, which was later increased to 150 cases.

### *Main results*

1. All but one returnee had been abroad for more than 6 years.

2. Returnees had a wide range of occupations; many were semi-skilled.

3. 57.1% had found full-time work within their profession, 18.3% were working part-time; 16.3% had found odd jobs; and 8.1% had not found any job.

4. 60.9% were satisfied with their job, however 87.5% consider their working conditions as only fair to poor and only 28.6% believe that they will improve.

5. 38.8% consider their overall reintegration as good; 46.9% as fair.

6. Despite difficulties 90.8% did not regret their decision to return.

7. 57.4% of returnees said that the project had played a very important to essential part in their decision to return.

## DIASPORA – IOM STRENGTHENING STRATEGIES – THE MIDA

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In order to meet specific human resource needs in public/private/economic sectors of the target countries, IOM is expanding the return concept, through implementing the MIDA programme.

Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) is a program for mobilising the skills and financial resources of Africans in the diaspora for development in Africa.

MIDA is a demand-driven capacity building program. Its objective is the transfer of knowledge, know-how of expertise, financial and other resources of Africans in the Diaspora for development in African countries. It differs from RQAN in some notable ways. Whereas permanent physical return of the beneficiary to the country of origin was a precondition in RQAN, MIDA has flexible eligibility and transfer options.

Under MIDA, the private sectors should remain the main actor and focus throughout implementation of the program. The MIDA program seeks to involve the contribution of all stakeholders in countries of the North and the South especially Africans in the Diaspora in order to broaden the program's ownership base. MIDA has flexible arrangements that provide for various options of skill's transfer. These include permanent, temporary, sequenced/repeated, and even tele-working transfer. The arrangements do not require that nationals, whose services are needed in their countries of origin, necessarily relocate or give up the positions or rights acquired in the host countries. They should be able to move back and forth between origin and host countries where they may be legally residing.

This new approach takes into account the need for select immigration shortages of highly qualified personnel in specific sectors in Europe, on the one hand, and the concern to mitigate the effect on the growing brain-drain on the African continent, on the other hand.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas. An introduction*, UCL Press, London, 1997.
- <sup>2</sup> Nicholas Van Hear, *New Diasporas. The mass exodus, dispersal and re-grouping of migrant communities*, UCL Press, London, 1998.
- <sup>3</sup> Russel King, Generalizations from the history of return migration, in: *Return Migration. Journey of Hope or Despair?*, edited by Bimal Ghosh, IOM/UN, Geneva, 2000, pp. 7-55.
- <sup>4</sup> Khalid Koser, Return, readmission and reintegration: changing agendas, policy frameworks and operational programmes, in: *Return Migration. Journey of Hope or Despair?*, edited by Bimal Ghosh, IOM/UN, Geneva, 2000, pp. 57-99.
- <sup>5</sup> Russel King, Generalizations from the history of return migration, in: *Return Migration. Journey of Hope or Despair?*, Edited by Bimal Ghosh, IOM/UN, Geneva 2000.
- <sup>6</sup> Jannick B. Pedersen, *MONISKIL. A methodology for monitoring skill acquisition, loss and utilization*, UNDP/ILO, 1988.