

2

Migration and Commonwealth Small States: The Case of Teachers and Nurses

Roli Degazon-Johnson

1. INTRODUCTION

For some years now there has been a new wave in migration taking place called the 'global search for talent' (Kapur, Devesh and McHale, 2005). It is characterised by large movements from the countries of the south to the north, among the highly skilled groups in particular; and the relaxation or modification of immigrations laws and policies to facilitate the movement of the highly skilled which has been identified among Commonwealth industrialised countries – Canada and the United Kingdom in particular – but are also noted with Australia and New Zealand, for example. There have been many calls for Caribbean leaders in public, academic and non-governmental sectors to become aware of the lack of retention and the loss of human capital to the region, through this renewed wave of recruitment and migration, recognising that governments can use human capital as important leverage in labour market negotiations on the trade in skills.

The September 2006 United Nations Special General Assembly focused on Migration and Development as being among the most critical and challenging issues on the geo-political map, of equal importance with Climate Change. The convening of this United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) was one of Kofi Annan's last actions before demitting office; the November 2007 Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Council of Ministers for Health and Social Development focused on labour migration; these events, and others like them, awaken the hope that this region may at last be recognising the value of its human capital, which has been vanishing before its eyes. It is imperative that the Caribbean region begins to address this 'migration merry-go-round', which may prove extremely serious for the small states of the Commonwealth if left unchecked.

This chapter first presents an overview of some of the key issues for small states and those of the Caribbean in particular; it then focuses on the situation in relation to recruitment and migration of healthcare workers and teachers, addressing unethical recruitment among highly skilled workers; and it closes by proposing a leveraging of human resources by policy-makers in order to address human capital loss, and encourage retention and the return of highly skilled workers to small states.

2. HIGHLY SKILLED MIGRATION

Migration of highly skilled professionals seeking career advancement is not a recent phenomenon globally or for Commonwealth small states. Little in-depth study of the phenomenon has been made based on size of country and the impact of human capital loss on small states in particular. It is known that in the case of the 32 small states of the Commonwealth, the 12 member countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean experience high levels of migration among the most skilled workers which, alongside remittances as a percentage of GDP, are among the highest in the world (Mishra, 2006).

2.1 *Brain Drain and Gain*

The traditional view of 'brain drain' looks on all movements of skilled people as human capital loss, certainly for developing countries. There is a large body of opinion, however, which proposes that migration can be a 'win-win' or 'brain gain' to both source and receiving countries. There is recognition that, even with the high level of remittances coming into the Caribbean, for example, through formal channels, there is a net loss in human capital among the highly skilled which cannot be replaced by remittances (Mishra, 2006).

Formerly, the Caribbean used to lose the unemployed, possibly unemployable, and was pleased for them to find and seek a better life elsewhere. More recently, the Caribbean has lost and is continuing to lose a critical resource to its development – teachers and health personnel – at extremely high levels. Over recent decades 70 per cent of the work force which has received tertiary education has migrated to industrialised countries. Guyana, Grenada, Jamaica, St Vincent and The Grenadines have the highest tertiary emigration rates in the region followed by Haiti, Trinidad and Tobago, and St Kitts and Nevis (Mishra, 2006).

3. MIGRATION MERRY-GO-ROUND

The industrialised Commonwealth members – Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom and Canada – are among the leaders in this migration merry-go-round in which their skilled migrants, usually young new graduates, seek

work abroad and then return after a sojourn leading to 'brain circulation' and constituting 'brain gain' to the source country. Such brain circulation and brain gain is not happening to any great extent in the Commonwealth Caribbean among highly skilled workers and, from the evidence being gathered, not to any great extent in the other 20 Commonwealth small states in Africa and the Pacific. Historically, when people from small states migrate it is a decision usually taken by mid-level professionals. This decision, however, is not based on the desire to see a little of the world before returning home; it is a decision often made for good and it works in the following way.

Canada, for example, loses its trained nurses to the USA, so Canada recruits from South Africa who in turn recruits from its nearby African neighbours and from as far afield as Cuba. New Zealand, whose health personnel are recruited by the UK, then recruits from the Pacific Islands. A similar picture applies to teachers. The most recent data revealed that New Zealand actively recruits teachers from the UK and Ireland, as they cannot retain their own teaching stock. The UK then replenishes its teaching stock with South Africa's teachers who can find teaching positions in the UK upon graduation, without teaching experience. Canada welcomes South African teachers as well as those from the UK and Australia. When there is a shortfall in one of these industrialised countries, then developing countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific and small states are used as the means of filling the gap. Little consideration is being given to the impact of this recruitment on the human capital needs and development of the developing country or small state. As the Minister of Education of Cayman stated at the meeting in 2002 from which the Savannah Accord emerged, 'the loss of one teacher from my school system has an impact as great probably as the loss of 15 from the system of a large country'. The issue of economies of scale is pertinent here.

3.1 Healthcare Workers/Nurses

With regard to the exodus of doctors, nurses, radiologists, laboratory technicians, public health professionals and teachers in Commonwealth small states it is necessary to remember that, as a consequence of the healthcare demands of the industrialised members – Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK – between 20 and 35 per cent of their health workforce is from overseas. At the same time, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) estimated that between 2001–04, more than a quarter of the 13,046 nursing positions in the Caribbean region were vacant, and while 1,199 new nurses graduated during that period, 900 nurses left the region in the same period (see Salmon, 2006). It has been stated that the flow of health workers, partly as a result of active recruitment by *developed countries*, is a symptom of a deeper-seated problem in these same developed countries, which have failed to plan and retain sufficient nurses from their own sources (see Buchan, 2006).

3.2 Teachers

Jamaica, which has a population of fewer than 3 million, lost nearly 1,000 teachers to the UK between 2001–03, more than Canada lost, which has a population of 30 million. Guyana trains 300 teachers each year and loses that number to migration overseas. Education International has stated that, in industrialised countries the demographic trends of ageing populations are coinciding with limited inflows of young teachers. Over the next decade, up to 40 per cent of teachers in industrialised countries will retire and industrialised countries have the means to address this impending shortfall, but have planned poorly and are now buying their human resources from overseas (Van der Schaaf, 2005).

The Caribbean is beginning to monitor the movement of its teachers and nurses in particular and there is evidence of this from Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and Barbados. Data from the Pacific, however, is anecdotal as until recently, it would appear that Pacific Island leadership has seen only benefit to be derived from the migration of their human capital due to the income of remittances. Significantly, however, in 2005 the Minister of Education of Fiji Islands – which is at present suspended from Commonwealth membership – reported that, while that region had not experienced the extent of teacher migration and international recruitment of other regions, they were alert to the possibility that this might increase. Within the two-year period of 2005–2007, probably as a result of the civil unrest in Fiji Islands which may be leading to forced migration, the number of inquiries received from Fijian teachers by New Zealand’s teacher recruitment website has grown to be the highest in the Pacific region. At a recent Commonwealth Forum in the Pacific, teaching service commissioners from Samoa advised that they were losing their trained teachers to Australia. However, on further investigation, they discovered that their valued teaching resources are not being employed as teachers, but as bus drivers and prison warders.

4. QUALIFICATIONS RECOGNITION, PARITY AND TRANSFERABILITY

Competent teachers and nurses are restricted or prevented from benefiting fully from the compensation and benefits that they could be earning in the recruiting countries. For example, within the European Union, there is a directive regarding tertiary level qualifications which stipulates that, once a graduate has obtained a degree from a European tertiary institution, they have a right to be employed and treated equally anywhere in Europe, including the UK (see EU Council Directive). The same is not true of Commonwealth teachers or nurses, however. Teachers are informed that, because they do not hold European qualifications and do not have ‘Qualified Teacher Status’, they cannot be paid on the same basis as a qualified teacher from Europe. Overseas nurses are

also obliged to pursue a 3–6 month programme before they are permitted to carry out their professional duties in the UK, for example. While they wait, they are employed at levels of compensation below that of their UK counterparts with similar qualifications. This is ‘brain waste’, a form of devaluation of the skills and competencies of the highly skilled.

4.1 Wage Differentials

In all this there is a global migration hierarchy based on wages which – according to Stillwell and Evans (2006) – places health personnel from small, poor developing island states of the Caribbean and the Pacific at the bottom of the global hierarchy and the situation is no less true for teachers. The warning is very clear: if health personnel and teachers are paid at levels such that they will be attracted by the higher wages of other countries, then the small states of the Commonwealth will always be at risk of losing them. In addition, if these skilled professionals were paid at a level that they could use as leverage to negotiate better salaries with the recruiting country, it would place them at a higher value to those countries. Instead, often when the recruiting country wishes to save on its costs is the time it turns to recruiting from developing countries, as it knows that its salaries will be a seduction. This has produced many complaints from teachers who rushed to be recruited abroad, seduced by the ‘greener pastures’, only to find that they had to pay levels of tax – income and council tax – find accommodation, transportation and cope with a number of unexpected and unanticipated costs of living expenses, which they had not been advised of before their arrival and which were not outlined in their contracts.

It would seem that, if it were possible to pay salaries at a level for these valued resources which reduced the ‘pull’ factors of the recruiting countries, it would do both the health and teaching professions of the small states a great service.

4.2 Unethical Recruitment of the Highly Skilled

Even the skilled migrant can be subject to exploitation when being recruited to some recruiting countries. The highly skilled have been manipulated and exploited by those who are recruiting them, be they recruitment businesses and agencies, education or health bodies, or even schools and hospitals which often recruit directly. In November 2005, the General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers of the UK stated that teachers recruited by agencies to the United Kingdom had, in instances, been lied to by agencies, paid outside of the national wage and pay guidelines, put into accommodation with homeless people and those with mental illness, made redundant without justification and had their self-confidence and dignity eroded (see Sinnott, 2005). There have also been accounts of health personnel recruited from overseas being

misled about their salary level, career prospects and accommodation (see Buchan, 2006).

4.3 Remittances

Remittances (that is, money earned by nationals working abroad that is then invested in their homeland) are often presented as the antidote or panacea for migration of the highly skilled. Remittances have clearly made significant differences to the quality of life for many people. Children have been clothed, fed and educated with remittances; houses have been built; countries with balance of payments problems have been supported. Remittances also have a downside, however, in that they can produce a negative multiplier effect in encouraging import dependency, as they are used to purchase imports such as cars and other consumer items. In this way, they can drive inflation up and do not appear to result in investment in capital-generating activities. In some states, rather than raising the standard of living, they tend to increase dependency, erode good work habits and heighten inequalities in communities. Worse still, they have been found to create envy and resentment and induce consumption spending among non-migrants. It should not be forgotten that when a qualified doctor, nurse or teacher migrates they take the following with them:

- the capital outlay that went into their education from primary school through university
- the future taxes which their income would have generated
- the skills which could make a great difference to health, education and welfare of many people in their country.

4.4 Commonwealth Efforts for Ethical Recruitment of the Highly Skilled

Commonwealth initiatives strongly supported by small states governments yielded the International Code of Practice for the Recruitment of Health Workers in 2003 and the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol (CTRP) in 2004. (The CTRP came about through the initiatives of eight education ministers of Caribbean small states in Barbados in 2002). These instruments do not seek to restrict free movement of labour, as many wrongly believe. They do seek to balance the rights of highly skilled workers to free movement and migration against the need to prevent erosion of the development process in Least Developed Countries (LDC) and to prevent the exploitation of scarce human resources of these countries. The Commonwealth Secretariat is becoming increasingly engaged with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Labour Organization (ILO), Education International (EI) and the World Health Organization (WHO), as they seek to ensure that when people migrate to other countries they are properly treated, their rights are respected and they have the benefit of ethical recruitment procedures.

4.5 Forced Migration

There are skilled professionals who wish to return to their own countries, but who do not see that they would be returning to an environment conducive to their own development, financially, professionally or from the standpoint of their own personal security and that of their families. In the Caribbean, unless there is a reduction in the levels of violence and crime, this will be a deterrent to returning professionals. It should be noted that there is a direct correlation between political instability and outward migration.

5. LEVERAGING THE HUMAN RESOURCE SKILLS

This chapter concludes on a final point of leveraging the human resources of small states by referring to the work of the Washington-based Centre for Global Development (CGD), which proposes four strategies as policies for source countries losing their scarce skills. They propose four Cs – Control, Creation, Compensation and Connection.

Control speaks to the policies to promote economic and political stability, thereby positively encouraging retention and return of highly skilled professionals to the source country. Creation proposes policies including the expansion of higher education opportunities to promote and leverage the human skill output. Compensation – always a fraught issue – urges the payment of direct compensation to governments in instances of major human capital loss and urges development aid and assistance in exchange for the loss. Connection focuses on the Diaspora and the promotion of brain circulation even on a temporary basis.

In summary, governments of Commonwealth small states and specifically Ministries of Education and Health should seek special ‘consideration’ from countries that recruit their highly skilled people. They should engage in discussions that lead to:

- forms of assistance being provided by the recruiting country
- specific professional development programmes for teachers and nurses
- capacity building to increase the output of highly skilled workers in source countries.

Small states should be negotiating so that wealthier countries who want the highly skilled people they produce provide the means of strengthening the capacity of the poorer small state to produce more teachers and nurses by assisting source country health and teacher training institutions and mechanisms (see Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol, 2004). While several of these initiatives are in operation already, much more can be done and much more is possible so as to ensure that the loss of the skilled personnel from small states does not have an adverse impact on the advancement of those states.

References

- Buchan, J. (2006): *Migration of Health Workers: The Policy Challenges*, presentation to International Centre on Nurse Migration Symposium, February 20, Marlborough House, London.
- Commonwealth Secretariat (2004): *Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol*, published by Commonwealth Secretariat, London.
- EU Council Directive on a General System for the Recognition of Higher Education Diplomas awarded on completion of professional education and training of at least three years duration (89/48/EC)¹ as well as Directives 89/49/EC² and 92/51/EC³ which provide for 'mutual recognition' hence equality of treatment in education qualifications.
- Kapur, D, McHale, J. (2005): *Policy Options* in 'Give Us Your Best and Brightest: The global hunt for talent and its impact on the developing world', Center for Global Development, Washington, DC, USA.
- Mishra, P. (2006): in *Emigration and Brain Drain: Evidence from the Caribbean*, IMF Western Hemisphere Department, January.
- Salmon, M.E. (2006): in *Addressing the Critical Shortage of Nurses: A Case Study from the Caribbean*, Commonwealth Health Ministers Reference Book.
- Sinnott, S. (2005): in presentation at Commonwealth Public Lecture at 15CCEM Mid-Term Review of Africa/Europe in Sierra Leone, November.
- Stillwell, B. and Evans, T. (2006): in *Health Worker Migration: Should we Worry?*, in Commonwealth Health Ministers Yearbook, Henley Media Group/Commonwealth Secretariat, London.
- Van der Schaaf, W. (2005): Education International, report on the *Consultation on the recruitment and migration of the highly skilled (nurses and teachers)*, 25 January, Commonwealth Secretariat, London.