

# "Migration and Commonwealth Small States – the case of Teachers and Nurses"

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## ABSTRACT:

Dr Johnson explores the wave in migration taking place called the "global search for talent", characterised by large movements from the countries of the south to the north among the highly skilled groups and the implications of this for Commonwealth Small States in particular. Focussing on the situation in relation to recruitment and migration of health care workers and teachers, she explores the issues in the context of the "Migration Merry-Go -Round" which is in evidence, pin-pointing issues relating to qualifications recognition, parity and transferability, wage differentials, remittances, forced migration and the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat in addressing unethical recruitment among the highly skilled in particular. She closes by proposing a "leveraging" of our human resources by small states policy-makers to address human capital loss and depletion through and encouragement of retention and return of the highly skilled to small states.

There is – and has been for some years now – a new wave in migration taking place called the “global search for talent”.<sup>1</sup> 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 industrialized countries - Canada and the United Kingdom in particular - but are also noted with Australia and New Zealand, for example. In the SALISES conference last year, I had made a forceful case for Caribbean leaders in public, academic and non-governmental sectors to wake up to the lack of retention and the loss of human capital to our 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 to which I just referred focussed on Migration and Development as among the critical and most challenging issues on the geo-political map, up there with Climate Change . The convening of this Special UNGASS was one of Kofi Annan’s last actions before demitting office. The November CARICOM Council of Ministers for Health and Social Development focus on labour migration and this UWI SALISES re-focus on this area, makes me more optimistic than I was a year ago, that maybe this region is awaking to the treasure in its human capital which it is allowing to vanish before its eyes. I do hope that the Caribbean is seriously starting to address this “migration merry-go-round” which may prove not so merry for small states of the Commonwealth if we do not pay it due regard.

First, a quick overview of some of the key issues for small states and those of the Caribbean in particular:

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 although some has been undertaken by Randall Baker and Baldocchino among others. We do know that In the case of the 32 small states of the Commonwealth, the twelve member countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean, experience high levels of migration by our most skilled which alongside our remittances as a percentage of our GDP, are among the highest in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Brain Drain and Gain? The traditional view of Brain Drain looks on all movements of skilled persons 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

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<sup>1</sup> Kapur, Devesh and McHale, John in “Give us your best and brightest – the Global Hunt for Talent and its Impact on the Developing World” publ. Center for Global Development (2005).

<sup>2</sup>Mishra, Prachi in “Emigration and Brain Drain: Evidence from the Caribbean” publ. IMF Western Hemisphere Department, (January 2006)

channels, we have a net loss in human capital among the highly skilled which cannot be replaced by remittances. (Schiff, World Bank 2005 and Mishra, IMF, 2006)

In the Caribbean we used to lose the unemployed, possibly unemployable, and were pleased for them to find and seek a better life elsewhere. Today, we have lost and are continuing to lose a critical resource to our development – our teachers and health personnel - at extremely high levels. Over recent decades 70 percent of the work-force which has received tertiary education has migrated to industrialized 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)<sup>3</sup>.

Migration Merry-Go-Round: Our industrialized 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 our highly skilled 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 taken usually by mid-level professionals and the decision is not based on the desire to see a little of the world before returning home. It is a decision often made for good. Here is how it works: Canada, for example, loses its trained nurses to the USA, so Canada recruits from South Africa who then turns around and recruits from its nearby African neighbours and from as far afield as Cuba. New Zealand whose health personnel are recruited by the United Kingdom then recruits from the Pacific Islands. A similar picture applies for teachers. Our 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 industrialized 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 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.

Health care workers/nurses: With regard to the exodus of doctors, nurses, radiologists, lab technicians, public health professionals and teachers in Commonwealth small states remember that as a consequence of the health care demands of our

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<sup>3</sup> Mishra, Prachi in “Emigration and Brain Drain: Evidence from the Caribbean” publ. IMF Western Hemisphere Department, (January 2006)

industrialized members – Canada; Australia; New Zealand and the UK – between 20 – 35 percent of their health workforce is from overseas. At the same time PAHO estimated that between 2001 - 4, more than a quarter of the 13,046 nursing positions in the Caribbean region were vacant, and whilst 1,199 new nurses graduated during that period 900 nurses left the region<sup>4</sup> in the same period. It has been stated that the flows of health workers, partly as a result of active recruitment by *developed countries*, is a symptom of a deeper-seated problems in these (developed) countries which have failed to plan and retain sufficient nurses from their own sources". (Buchan, 2006)<sup>5</sup>

Teachers: Jamaica with a population of under 3 million lost to the UK between 2001 – 3 nearly 1000 teachers, more than a country the size of Canada with a population of 30 million. Guyana trains 300 teachers each year and loses that number to migration overseas. Education International, has stated that in industrialized countries the demographic trends of ageing populations are coinciding with limited inflows of young teachers. Over the next decade, up to 40% of teachers in industrialized countries will retire and industrialized countries have the means to address this impending shortfall, but have planned poorly and are now buying their human resources from overseas.<sup>6</sup> Whereas in the Caribbean we are starting to monitor the movement of our teachers and nurses in particular – at least there is evidence of this from Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica and Barbados - data from the Pacific 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 – which is at present suspended from Commonwealth membership - reported that whilst that region had not experienced the extent of teacher migration and international recruitment of other regions, they were on the alert. Within that two year period, we believe as a result of the civil unrest in Fiji which may be leading to forced migration, the number of inquiries received from Fijian teachers by New Zealand's teacher recruitment web-site has grown to be the highest in the Pacific region. I recently coordinated a Commonwealth Forum in the Pacific in which teaching service commissioners from Samoa advised that they are losing their trained teachers to Australia. However, when they go to that country, they discover that their valued teaching resources are not being employed as teachers but as bus drivers and prison warders.

Qualifications Recognition, Parity and Transferability: There is Brain Waste: Competent teachers and nurses are prevented or restricted in benefiting fully from the compensation and benefits which they could be earning in the recruiting countries. For example, within the European Union, there is a directive regarding tertiary level

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<sup>4</sup> Salmon, Marla E. in "Addressing the critical shortage of nurses: a case study from the Caribbean" publ. Commonwealth Health Ministers Reference Book (2006)

<sup>5</sup> Buchan, James in presentation entitled "Migration of Health Workers: The Policy Challenges" to International Centre on Nurse Migration Symposium, February 20, 2006, Marlborough House, London.

<sup>6</sup> Van der Schaaf, Wouter of Education International in report on the "Consultation on the Recruitment and Migration of the Highly Skilled (Nurses and Teachers)" publ. Commonwealth Secretariat, January 25, 2005.

qualifications which stipulates that once a graduate had obtained a degree from a European tertiary institution, they have a right to be employed and treated equally anywhere in Europe and this includes the United Kingdom<sup>7</sup>. The same is not true of Commonwealth teachers or nurses, however. Teachers are told that because they do not hold European qualifications and that they 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 three-to-six month programme before they are permitted to carry out their professional duties in the UK, for example. Whilst 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.

Wage Differentials: In all this there is a global migration hierarchy based on wages which – according to Stillwell and Evans (2006)<sup>8</sup> – 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 writing on the wall is very clear: If we pay our health personnel and teachers at wages such that they will be attracted by the higher wages of other countries then we will always be at risk of losing them. If we could even pay them salaries at a level which they could use as leverage to negotiate for better salaries with the recruiting country, it would place them at a higher value to those countries. Instead, frequently when the recruiting country wishes to save on its costs is when it turns to recruit from developing countries as it knows that its salaries will be a seduction. And I use the word intentionally as I have heard the complaints of 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 cost of living related expenses, which they had not been advised of before their arrival and which were not outlined in their contracts.

It would seem that if we could pay salaries at a level for these valued resources which reduce the “pull” factors of the recruiting country, we would do both the health and nursing professions of our small states a great service.

Unethical recruitment of the Highly skilled Even the skilled migrant can be subjected 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, even schools and hospitals which often recruit directly. In November 2005, the General Secretary of the National Union of

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<sup>7</sup> 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) <sup>7</sup> as well as Directives 89/49/EC<sup>7</sup> and 92/51/EC<sup>7</sup> which provide for “mutual recognition” hence equality of treatment in education qualifications,

<sup>8</sup> Stillwell, Barbara and Evans, Tim in “Health worker migration – should we worry?” in Commonwealth Health Ministers Yearbook (2006)publ. Henley Media Group/Commonwealth Secretariat.

Teachers of the United Kingdom 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 persons with mental illness, made redundant without justification and had their self-confidence and dignity eroded.<sup>9</sup> There have been accounts of health personnel recruited from overseas being misled about their salary level, career prospects and accommodation. (Buchan, 2006)<sup>10</sup>

Remittances often presented as the antidote – the panacea – for migration of the highly skilled have clearly made significant differences to the quality of life of many people. Children have been clothed, fed and educated with remittances, houses built, countries with balance of payments problems supported. Remittances also have a down-side 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, 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 are inclined 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 (Nunn, 2005). We must not forget that when that qualified doctor, nurse or teacher migrates they take with them (i) the capital outlay that went into their education from primary school through university (ii) the future taxes which their income would have generated (iii) the skills which could make a great difference to health, education and welfare of many people in their country.

Commonwealth efforts for ethical recruitment of the highly skilled: Commonwealth initiatives strongly supported by Small States governments, have yielded the International Code of Practice for the Recruitment of Health Workers (2003) and the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol (2004). (I am always pleased to note that it was here in Barbados in 2002 that the genesis of the CTRP came about, through the initiatives of 8 education ministers of Caribbean Small states) . These instruments do not seek to restrict free movement of labour as many wrongly believe. They do seek to balance the rights of the highly skilled to free movement and migration against the need to prevent erosion of the development process in LDCs countries and to prevent the exploitation of scarce human resources of these countries.<sup>11</sup> The Commonwealth Secretariat is becoming increasingly engaged with the International Organization on Migration, International Labour Organization, Education International, the World Health Organization 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 .

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<sup>9</sup> Sinnott, Steve in presentation at Commonwealth Public Lecture at 15CCEM Mid-Term Review of Africa/Europe in Sierra Leone (November 2005)

<sup>10</sup> Buchan, James in presentation entitled “Migration of Health Workers: The Policy Challenges” to International Centre on Nurse Migration Symposium, February 20, 2006, Marlborough House, London.

<sup>11</sup> In “Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol” publ. Commonwealth Secretariat (2004)

Forced Migration: There are skilled professionals who wish to return 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 reduction in the levels of violence and crime in our societies, this will be a deterrent to returning professionals. I mentioned earlier the increase in inquiries/hits on the New Zealand from Fijian teachers....note the relationship between political instability and outward migration.

Leveraging our Human Resource Skills: I want to conclude on this final point of leveraging the human resources of small states by referring to the work of the Washington-based Centre for Global Development who propose four strategies as policies for source countries losing their scarce skills.<sup>12</sup> 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 the highly skilled in the source country.. Creation proposes policies including the expansion of higher education opportunities to promote and leverage our 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” in countries which recruit our highly skilled. They should engage in discussions which lead to (a) forms of assistance being provided by the recruiting country (b) specific professional development programmes for teachers and nurses and (c) capacity building to increase the output of the highly skilled in source countries. Small States should be negotiating so that the wealthier countries who want the highly skilled which 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..<sup>13</sup> Whilst several of these initiatives are up and running already, much more can be done and much more is possible so as to ensure that the loss of the skilled personnel of small states does not adversely impact the advancement of those states.

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<sup>12</sup> Kapur D. and McHale J. in “Give us your brightest and your best – the Global Hunt for Talent and the Impact on the Developing World” – Center for Global Development, Wahsington (2005)

<sup>13</sup> Pg. 9, Para 3.2 in “Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol” publ. Commonwealth Secretariat (2004)

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