From extraction to knowledge reproduction: The impact of Australia's development awards on Uganda and Mozambique

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With the renewed emphasis on higher education as an agent for development and economic growth, Australia has joined other Western countries in contributing to increasing the intellectual workforce of Africa[1]. While Australia has provided scholarships to Africans for more than three decades, since 2005, the Australian Government has dramatically increased its commitment to invest in Africa's future by providing a series of development awards scholarships for Africans to advance their learning in priority areas including agriculture, food security, water and sanitation, public health, energy and resource management. These scholarships are the largest component of Australia's total aid to Africa. However, very little empirical research has been done to determine the impact of Australia Africa Long Term scholarship awards (AALT). This paper examines this new African intellectual workforce by presenting qualitative data from alumni engaging in this new flow of knowledge mobility. Experiences of public health graduates of Australia scholarship awards from Uganda and Mozambique will be discussed. Overall, we argue that that the Australia Africa scholarships program has a positive impact on alumni and is viewed favourably by alumni's employers and their families. However, there are many challenges and struggles which can impede alumni's success in bringing forth the change they might envisage. Some of these factors include: finding a job at a suitable level, implementing their new knowledge, using their new skills and, generally, reintegrating into their home country (both socially and professionally).

Keywords: Australia Africa scholarships; alumni network; development aid; reintegration

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[1] It is important to note here that 'Africa' is itself a construction; a geo-political entity that comprises of 54 countries and even more cultural groups. However, African perspectives may be a useful term albeit one that involves a certain amount of strategic generalization.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960s Australia has given government scholarships for African students to study postgraduate degrees in Australia. Australia is not alone in providing scholarships as part of development assistance (i.e. development aid). According to Varghese (2008) many governments fund international scholarship programs as a form of development assistance. One of the important premises behind the awards has been to equip Africans with the skills and knowledge to promote economic growth. Additionally, proving scholarships as aid could be regarded as addressing presumed shortages of highly skilled workers. However, an alternative goal of the Australian scholarship program is to shape collective impressions and perceptions of Australia. In this framework, one might see the schemes in postcolonial terms as part of 'soft power'.

We note that Australia itself had a colonial (British) heritage and, in some ways, it could be considered part of the global South (see Connell, 2007). However, in relation to countries in the Asia Pacific there are vestiges of a colonial assumption that it can impose its will on its neighbours. Whilst Australia does not have a direct colonial relationship to Africa, it is a 'western' country and in common with the West it has a history of exploitation of Africa's natural resources. Australia's presence in Africa relates to extractive industries (see Negin and Denning, 2011) – China too. However, arguably it is seen by Africans as a 'nice' neutral country, as opposed to France and the United Kingdom (to name a few), who are often regarded as having used and misused the continent for a long time. As a result Australia is given more leeway. There have been critics of course. The connection with removal of raw resources from Africa has been criticized by environmentalist and human rights activist groups (see Negin and Denning, 2011). Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that there is a stable inequality that is being continually reproduced in these relations and because of this poor countries are negatively impacted. In a way, Australia is trying to build a different image of itself on the African continent through such things as their scholarship programs. It is changing the discussion that people have about Australia by providing real experiences for people to talk about for generations to come. This is quite powerful, as it not only contributes to the human capital resource but, more importantly, it influences the course of national development and the nature of human resources in recipient countries.

In relation to Australian scholarships to Africa, there is still a need to round out the picture. For example, Harman (2005) states that, "comparatively little is available in the way of longer-term follow up studies of international student's education in Australian universities" (p.132). In the context of African scholarships even less has been done and most area of Australian Aid to Africa has equally been under-researched (see Cuthbert et al., 2008 and Negin & Denning, 2011). This lack of attempt to investigate the outcomes of Australia Africa scholarship graduates could be due to the fact that "AusAID does not have performance indicators to measure the outcomes of Australian Development Scholarships (ADS) in terms of students contributing to their country's development. The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) recognizes that the measurement of ADS outcomes is difficult because of time lags in returning students making contributions to their country's development, and the difficulty of relating individual efforts to broader economic and other developmental outcomes" (ANAO, 1999, p.16). It is understandable that research in this area is methodologically challenging. For example, there is a cost involved in tracking graduates, especially international ones. There are also other factors relating to access, which might make research more difficult to execute. There is no simple

stable measurement of scholarship benefits. Generally, measuring the effectiveness of aid is complex. As others have shown, many donor countries struggle with finding a satisfactory way to really measure its impacts (see Hollway, Farmer, Reid, Denton, and Howes, 2011).

Studies that are currently done in this area tend to focus on career progression outcomes: salary, employment rank/position in organizations and so-called "multiplier" effects, such as the number of people being trained by graduates (see Cuthbert et al, 2008). Although, these forms of data could be useful they may not provide a true indicator of the extent in which alumni affect their society. Furthermore, African scholarship students are a heterogeneous group. Differences in social background are a big indicator and this can have a great impact on issues such as access to the scholarships overseas. This article adds weight to the idea that it is important to use first hand data about the impact of Australia Africa scholarship awards. It is especially important to consider recipients' accounts of their experiences of scholarships not only during the scholarship but also after their return from overseas.

Gaining a deeper understanding of how Australia Africa scholarship alumni reintegrate back into their workplace and lifeworld upon return could help the Australia government to be more effective in allocating resources. Further, stakeholders and alumni can be clearer about their expectations of scholarships as aid. Providing this multilayered view of the complex processes of transformation of alumni returnees is at the core of our study. Australian African alumni have a story to tell which is different and unique to what is currently in the literature. This will presumably affect Australia and the recipient countries. For scholarship recipients gaining a degree overseas is life-changing. The level of expectation they receive can be extremely high and the pressure to succeed (i.e. bring forth change) is concomitantly greater. This could be due to the nature of the scholarships and what the scholarships mean. Some recipients talked in terms of getting a second chance at a 'better' life, or even of being given carte blanche to start things over and to 'get things right'.

PROBLEMATIZING SCHOLARSHIPS AS AID

With vague and broad objectives comes a lack of ability to know for sure what to measure, especially as policies tends to deal in 'ambit claims'/grand abstractions. Identifying the exact objectives of the Australia Awards in Africa is not so easy to do. According to the AusAID Annual Report 2012-2013, the "fundamental purpose of the Australian aid program is to help people overcome poverty. This also serves Australia's national interests by promoting stability and prosperity both in our region and beyond" (p. ix). The Outcomes Evaluation of the In-Africa Australian Development Scholarships Management Program (IAAMP, 2012) states that the goal of the Australia Awards in Africa is "contributing to achievement of MDGs in Africa while promoting Australia as an active partner in African development" (p.9). The ANAO (2011) report claims the objective of providing scholarships to study in Australia is to (1) "promote sustainable development and excellence in education, by providing educational, research and professional development opportunities to support the growth of the region; and (2) build enduring links at the individual, institutional and country levels" (p.56). As demonstrated above, over time the objectives of the Australian scholarship have varied from poverty alleviation,

sustainable development, individual empowerment, and links to Australia to development impact. All of the above have not been properly measured. Thus, it is very difficult to determine the 'real' effectiveness of the scholarship program, and/or have a baseline in which to assess the outcomes/impact of the scholarship awards. What complicates things even more is the fact that Australia gives scholarships to African students directly and not via a mediating source such as national governments – this could be good or bad. Perhaps our attention should be more on how "effectiveness" is defined, including who determines what is effective and how it is known to be so – a discussion for another time. As noted, the existing research paradigm around Australia scholarship programs focuses on outcomes rather than process (see AusAID, 2010, Cuthbert et al., 2008). This could perhaps explain the lack of research on Australian scholarships to Africa. It could also be that the Australia government does not want to know the outcomes of their massive investments in scholarships. It is believed that the vast majority of the money ends up in elite universities and local/foreign-based private contractors who are appointed to manage the awards (see Hilton, 2013).

In spite of the lack of research into feedback and consequences, aid for higher education has been a major component of the Australian aid program. According to Negin and Denning (2011) the Australia Africa scholarships are the largest component of aid to Africa reaching approximately $99 million in 2014-15. In 2012, Australia invested $334.2m in scholarships, supporting 4,900 recipients from more than 145 countries (Negin, 2014). Between 2005 and 2012 the scale up of the Africa scholarship program has increased from ten countries to more than 30, from 80 candidates to 350 (Negin, 2014). It is estimated that the 168 Masters level awards in 2011 will increase to 400 in three years (Negin & Denning, 2011). There are many critiques of this approach, mainly because "the program has struggled to prove its effectiveness, with little evidence of its impact beyond anecdotal evidence of individual success stories and self-serving indicators (such as completion of a degree as an indicator of success)" (Hilton, 2013, para 4). In addition, links between scholarships and poverty reduction has been questioned noting that scholarships do not generally target the poor and directly impact a relatively small number of people (Negin, 2014).

The transformative powers (rather the claims of such) of higher education for the individual as well as for their society are a driving force behind the hype, but one not borne out by empirical evidence. Higher education has become a crucial ingredient in the economic development game. Although, the recognition of the relationship between education and economic growth (e.g. human capital theory) has been accepted, there is really not much empirical evidence to support this link (Cuthbert et al, 2008). The theoretical and methodological fuzziness around this as well as the demonstrable connections between higher education/scholarships to study overseas is often asserted and benefits to the individual and community is rarely established (Cuthbert et al, 2008). Additionally, some of the literature presents scholarships as 'neutral' in the sense of empowering individuals and/or being an investment (in human capital terms) in the recipient country. However, we know that 'aid' is not a neutral process (see Alger, 2014; Anderson, 1996). Historical imbalances and the flows of knowledge and capital between developed and underdeveloped countries play a role in maintain the status quo.

Still, there is a massive promotion/sell out of the higher education dream. As the World Bank (2002) put it, "tertiary education can offer better opportunities and life chances for low-income and minority students, thereby increasing their employability, income

prospects, and social mobility and decreasing income inequality. The norms, values, attitudes, ethics, and knowledge that tertiary institutions can impart to students contribute to the social capital necessary for constructing healthy civil societies and socially cohesive cultures, achieving good governance, and building democratic political systems" (p.5). This could be the driving force behind Australia's investment in scholarships. Based on our study there is some evidence for the hype but also there are reasons for the lack of well-established links between education overseas and better opportunities.

The above authors are in their right to point to these downfalls of higher education and the scholarship programs, reinforcing even more the need to better understand alumni experiences and stories in order to help reshape the discourse around scholarship as development aid.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study makes an important contribution because it tells us more about the values, experiences and cultural factors that play out in concrete situations, in this case Ugandan and Mozambican alumni. This study explores the perspectives of Australian-funded masters level alumni from Uganda and Mozambique on the outcomes of their scholarships. This study is part of a larger research project on the impact of scholarships on strengthening the health system in Africa. The research study employed both in-depth qualitative and quantitative research methods; however, the data presented here is based on the qualitative component of the study. This paper examines the experiences of thirty-one Ugandan and Mozambican returned scholars who studied in the health sector from seven Australian universities (2000-2013). The reason for the year restrictions is to provide enough time for proper conceptualization and measures of outcomes as many studies done in Australia "deal with the graduates' immediate post-graduation reflections on the study experience itself and the transition back" (Cuthbert et al, 2008, p.13).

Purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select information-rich cases so in-depth and rich analysis of main concepts of the study could take place. The face-to-face semi-structured interviews took place in-country and were based on the individual's accessibility, the time that they would like to be interviewed, the responses and the findings of the questionnaire. It was important to aim for an equal amount of men and women represented in the interview stage to ensure a gender balance in the responses (n=31). There were sixteen females and fifteen males[2] ages 32-41 with majority being in their mid-thirties. Each participant was given a fictitious name to maintain anonymity, and is identified by a pseudonym (or a code/number) rather than their real name.

A thematic qualitative analysis was used to construct meaning and create conceptual patterns across participants' responses. The reoccurring ideas, thematic commonalities and contradictions which have surfaced from the various narratives are presented here. An inductive approach to the data analysis was taken whereby findings emerged from data through the discovery of patterns, themes and categories (Patton, 2002). Further the findings are presented in a syncretic fashion (not treated sequentially by country). The

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[2] A gender-orientated analysis will not be the focus of this paper as a subsequent account is planned focussing upon this aspect.

focus is upon giving voice and space to the alumni narratives (i.e. their experiences and stories).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Some of the recurring themes derived from the participants' narratives are presented below. The following section highlights alumni's experiences with the Australian scholarship awards and discusses the effect on their livelihood, families, friends and their community upon return. The theme and sub-themes were chosen to categorize the big issues and to help shape the discussion.

Scholarships as aid – Individuals' ambivalences around lack of support

When asked, all of our participants agreed that scholarships were a good form of giving. Various reasons were given by participants, ranging from scholarships having multiplier effects to scholarships are good at exposing people to other systems (which benefits not only the individual, but also their country). Others think that it is a way to ensure sustainability. However, respondent UPKM's comment captures the sentiment of many participants. He states:

> *…Aid through scholarships leads to change in people's thinking and attitude, which is more important than bringing money to a village… So, while resources are a big problem in Africa, it is not as big a problem as their mindset, and the attitude that people have. So aid that ends up leading to change of mindset and understanding, in my opinion… achieves more than the aid that comes that's simply changing infrastructure (UPKM).*

Interestingly, some think a scholarship to study overseas is a good form of aid because it decreases corruption, as they believe their government would not have utilized the money effectively or in a better way. As one participant put it, "…it's [scholarships to study overseas] expensive. But I know even if you gave it to my country as money, probably it's not better utilized" (UJOM). In a way these scholarships divert resources, funds, tension and energy away from corrupt governments who would have frittering it away and ties it up with the 'good education process' instead. Similarly, all participants like the fact that their government was not in charge (but involved in the process) of selecting candidates. Many think if their government was in charge of selecting participants it would have been difficult for them to apply, to have access to the appropriate information to apply, hence not transparent, nor fair. As UIAF puts it "I think the government not being involved in the selection process is good. …if for instance it's the government involved in selection, you can never be certain that the selection is actually free and fair". The question of whether African governance is part of the problem, and that it is okay to by-pass it, is an interesting one to ponder.

Remarkably, nearly all of our participants would like the government to be involved upon return in supporting them during the period of reintegration. We found that too often returnees struggle to find a suitable job upon return even whilst there are shortages in their area of speciality. Participants reported a lack of understanding from their own government about the purpose of the Australian scholarships and the potential of returnees. Alumni advocated for better understanding and support from their government both with adjusting

back and building human capacity in the country. On the one hand, participants have doubts about the efficiency and their government's ability to use aid effectively, and on the other hand they still believe their government should become more involved. We have labelled this phenomenon "popular rational ambivalence". We acknowledge that it is a theory-in-formation, and its development will depend upon other investigators deepening our empirical knowledge in this area. It is important not to reinstate a 'West is superior' view by default here. Western nations also struggle to hold the confidence of their populations. One could argue that complaints about underinvestment or lack of government infrastructure bedevil most nations.

There has been some support in the literature for Australia to provide in-country scholarships in Africa for students to do undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and some in our study support this view (see Negin & Denning, 2011). The Australian government is currently funding short-term training programs in country and they have been successful. However, many would not support the Australian government giving scholarships to study degrees in their country. One reason for this apparent contradiction is that they felt that the level of access to up-to-date books and journal articles, fast internet, and to a computer and printer available to students in Australia is not available to students in their country and that "everyone who is doing their Master's should be able to experience that" (UNCF). They cited examples of students who were unable to finish a two-year Master's degree because the lecturers were not available to give lectures, and the course books were not ready. All the above indicated a failing bureaucracy which delayed completions. There have been stories of students sometimes taking four years or more to finish a two-year Master's degree. Some scholars and alumni may advocate for more government involvement. However, this would presume that the governments were not actually able to deliver on their intentions.

We can understand why alumni feel the way they do about scholarships. The ambivalence about poor organizational aspects and the lack of resources have to be given some weight as experience-based criticisms. Especially so when we might expect a more sanguine view as part of a positive bias resulting from the participants' gratitude at being granted opportunities to study abroad.

The pace at which donors want development and change to occur is another issue that came up. The pace at which one wants to instil development is quite different from the pace of the system in which 'messengers' of change (i.e. alumni) have to work in. Not surprisingly, the national context changes more slowly. It is not an easy task to instil change, especially at an institutional level. It is hard enough for alumni trying to maintain a balance between what they are willing to compromise over and what is needed in order for them to fit in a system which seems unable to accommodate their new way of thinking and doing things (see Amazan, 2011). There is a balancing act in trying to maintain a workable space where they can be happy and function well without losing focus. There is some personal 'wear and tear' that comes with the continuous presence of forced compromise.

Importantly we found, there is a discourse in 'scholarships as aid' which places the individual at the core of change, with the all the burdening of individuals that this implies. This 'self-driven' change is a major problem of the paradigm of scholarships as aid. It places the heavy weight of change and economic growth on the individual, knowing very

well that the individual needs a conducive environment and well-resourced support to bring forth any expected changes. When they are granted scholarships recipients are often made to be/feel solely responsible for change. This was quite evident in our data. The predominant view was that change is primarily an individual process. However, there were compounding factors. Many felt they faced challenges such as resistance to them in their workplace. This solo approach to change can be inspiring in some environments, but, given the lack of social and organizational support, it is also often too much of an individual burden.

As one participant put it, "applying new knowledge and skills… was just a self-driven thing" (UBAF). Alumni felt as if they had to make the running. The point here is that just giving them the skills is never going to be enough, and it is not going to necessarily secure the final outcome. It is what they *do* with these skills that is decisive in the last instance.

Impact

The level of impact varies from one participant to the next – from individual accomplishments to national or community-wide accomplishments. Some of the participants were able to put their skills and what they have learned to use, however that was dependent on where they work, when they returned home, and also the time when jobs are advertised. Some of the participants contributed to major developmental health changes in their country. They participated in major development strategies and interventions in the area of TB and HIV. These were vital in reducing opportunistic infections. Some recipients were also part of initiating International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10), training doctors, contributing to building the human and research capacity within the health sector and other health service improvements. For instance, at the time when TB was declared a national emergency in Mozambique (around 2005), one alumnus spearheaded some very effective interventions in trying to reduce the volume of patients and increasing the possibility of patients being cured.

Upon return, another female participant (MACF) led a team of people from various areas and ministries to help combat a strain of avian influenza. She was appointed to lead a team to come up with a contingency plan for Mozambique to fight avian influenza, and ran a Joint Contingency Plan for Avian Influenza. Also, under her leadership, a strategy for water and sanitation including food safety was put in place.

Alumni are also involved in the change around the way people with HIV and AIDS are perceived in their society. For instance one female Ugandan participant (UJWF) was part of a team who created a reproductive health program for HIV positive women. The new approach of these clinics was to look at HIV positive women as human beings with children, husbands and family who care for them, not just HIV positive patients. She also did some research on HIV positive women and their babies to support this approach of looking at the HIV positive women, "...as a whole person, not just what they have."

A few of the participants felt unable to identify their most significant accomplishments. However, this did not mean that they did not have an impact upon their return. Some said, perhaps too modestly, that they found it difficult to know whether they have made any impact at all. This could be due to various reasons, for instance, it could be due to the, in some cases, constant change of jobs amongst this group. This led to not having enough time in one place to really consolidate changes. However, one female participant (MACF)

found this question difficult to answer because, "I don't have a habit of quantifying my achievement." This is a very important statement because many times donors are too busy trying to quantify their impact that they overlook the individual struggles. This is near to the crux of the problem. Some of the outputs of individuals, and the outcomes for communities, are not to be reduced to one or two simple measures. Thus this paper joins with other work in the area in believing that it is difficult to quantify impact of the Australian scholarship Awards. Despite the diffuse nature of the effects we feel, along with the majority of our respondents, that these scholarship programmes *do* make a difference not only at the individual family level, but at the level of their community.

Even those who found some post-scholarship aspects frustrating retained a general belief in education and the link to national development in the broadest sense. All participants acknowledged the difference the scholarship made to their career.

It is often hard to see oneself (and one's trajectory) from 'the outside', as it were. The balance between stressing individual agency, versus the credit being owed to the schemes, is a more complex topic. Many respondents thought about this and it remained an unresolved area for them. For example, some had mixed feelings about whether the scholarship got them to where they are or whether they could have progressed anyway without the scholarship. This could be partly due to the types of candidates selected (i.e. ambitious, driven), and/or due to a combination of their personality and work experience. As one male participants put it:

> *...somehow I believe I could have progressed, yeah, but I think the scholarship gives that small hint of quality that might miss ... For me I think I could have reached but maybe I could have struggled much more, but maybe 80% I think I could have reached. With the scholarship definitely it's 100% (MRNM).*

One way of putting this is that the scholarship provided the potential for both personal and local change, but it did not provide guarantees. In one sense, the scholarship smoothed the way rather than producing complete achievements. According to one female participant, "if I didn't have this degree I wouldn't be able to cope at work–might get the job, but wouldn't be able to cope with the work" (MNCF).

Perhaps the difference, then, is not that without the scholarship alumni would not have gotten where they are (especially for the people who had senior level positions prior to the scholarship), but that the scholarships created a different pathway (possibly better, easier) to success, or what participants regarded as success. This alternative pathway could be said to make more of a difference in the quality of life of alumni.

Resistance and persistence

As suggested above, many participants have encountered difficulties and challenges in implementing their skills and knowledge. Many of them did not implement their skills in a direct way, but indirectly (e.g. ways of thinking, management skills, and etcetera). Participants talked about finding ways to apply their technical skills and knowledge. This was not always easy. Part of the difficulty lay in dealing with the internal relations of the system. This is what MSPF has to say:

> *...in every level of the system you will not always be able or be allowed to do what you think is right. So I've been struggling because I have my technical knowledge well organized and I know how I am supposed to do things. But the way the system wants things to be done sometimes does not allow for me to apply my technical knowledge. So I do apply it most of the time, but not the way I want to… I have to conform with the system, even though I keep trying.*

As expressed by the above participant, the will is there, but there are certain limitations that are out of alumni's control which put restrictions on what they are able to achieve.

> *…when you come back you always think that you do have lots of knowledge to give, but sometimes people think that it's someone that is going to take my job or, she knows more than me, and all these things. … Some people they don't want to have someone that has got more knowledge than you. And…sometimes you need to deal with lots of frustration because you think that you can give a lot, but people, they are not happy to receive a lot, so it takes me time to adapt… (MPSF).*

Many have expressed the same sentiment. There is a form of resistance that is embedded in insecurities of others. In one sense we could understand how they felt (partially) threatened by a better-qualified returnee. In discussing the attitudes of those who had not gone overseas, some of our respondents reported that they experienced a veiled hostility from others. They expressed frustration that it was often difficult to convince co-workers that they wanted to share the knowledge and skills they had obtained overseas. This was exacerbated in cases where the supervisor was less qualified then the alumni and/or not qualified enough to understand suggestions and new ideas offer by returnees.

Some participants believe the resistance from their colleagues could come from the fact that many did not have to compete to get their job once returning from study abroad. The lack of competition or transparent process to get a job could be contributing to these sentiments from their colleagues. As one participant, who got her job directly from the Minister of Health, put it, "…when it is the Minister that indicates you for the position, there is a group of people that will not believe that you are there because you deserve to be" (MPGF). This is an important point worth paying attention to; if the selection process (or lack thereof) for a job or a senior position does not seem to be fair and transparent, then it is understandable that their colleagues feel the way they do, especially if they are unable to get the same or similar opportunities to study abroad or upgrade their skills.

Similarly, MYMF got her job as the head of the Health Department immediately after returning (as did MNCF). MYMF basically presented her new qualification and they assigned her to be the Head of the Public Health Department. Although getting the job was easy, she, like others in our sample, struggled afterwards in her work place.

> *…the work was good, but the environment in my office was not that good, as you can imagine, because I was coming from Australia after one and a half years, and there were people there working and aiming to be the head of the Health Department (MYMF).*

Again, the process by which MYMF got her position created a hostile and difficult environment for her to work in. This pattern seems to be common with those receiving senior level positions upon their return (e.g. MYMF, MPGF) and amongst the earlier cohorts. For some it was not as easy to get jobs on return anymore which was perhaps counterintuitive.

Professional jealousy was also mentioned. However, those who worked with colleagues who had also received some sort of degree overseas experienced much less of this. Colleagues of alumni mainly wanted to learn and for alumni to teach them. Professional jealousy is not uncommon in other situations, and increasingly the competitive elements of the labour market can be intensified under neo-liberalism. Many African economies are following global trends in moving (or lurching) towards neoliberalism (see Connell, 2013).

This trend intersects with the scholarships as aid programmes in both restructuring inter-country relations and in remaking their labour markets. One obvious effect of this in interpersonal terms could be increased competitive individualism even expressed as professional jealousy. This in itself is a barrier to the snowball effect that is sometimes envisioned and/or expected by donors. This is a problem to ponder. Although alumni had an orientation to prepare them for some of the challenges before returning home, it is still very difficult to manage the aforementioned issues in daily life with all the complexities of personalities and personal histories.

Settling back into the system at home was more challenging for some than others. Some found it challenging to not have other co-workers who they now regarded as not having the same holistic level of understanding of issues as themselves. Here is a quote from a female participant from Mozambique explaining why it was a challenge for her to settle back into the system in her home country, and how she coped:

> *I must confess, it was really hard. It took me about I think only end of last year [returned in August 2012] I really started to ease… into the system. I was working within…private and multinational...things flow in a different speed. Whereas within the government, even if ...you do all you are supposed to do then you have to depend on mechanisms, not only people because ...but the mechanisms are so difficult. So I had a lot of trouble... when I got into that system ...I got frustrated for a while and then I realized that I had to go with the flow and understand what happens and then try to change wherever I could and that's how I'm surviving (MSPF).*

This pattern of experiencing difficulties upon return is common throughout the interviews. This could be explained by the bureaucratic and/or inflexible nature of the system in which alumni have to operate in. It could also be due to individuals in institutions who fear for their jobs and are insecure that someone who is educated overseas could take their job. It could also be explained by the fact that returnees/alumni desired more of themselves, their colleagues and the system. As one participant put it, "...seeing how things are done there and seeing how things are done here and then you begin to desire a certain standard of performance and accountability..." (UAAF).

From extraction to knowledge reproduction

It is challenging for participants to go overseas to gain new knowledge, new ways of doing things – a change in perspectives and to return back working in/for a system which has remain the same, which has not changed, and which can sometimes feel even more rigid for the returnees.

Some of the participants struggled to break through in their workplace with new ideas and new ways of approaching things. After trying multiple times to get others to appreciate, accept or understand their new ideas and perspectives, eventually, one or a combination of the following happens:

(1) After trying many times for years in one place they gave up and just do things the way everyone is happy with.
(2) Leave the job all together and go work somewhere (e.g. private, bilateral/multilateral organizations) were their ideas and new perspective will more likely be appreciated or a paid more for the similar service
(3) Stay in their job (for whatever reason) and little by little try to sneak in their ideas.
(4) A rare group was able to get support from colleagues after proving themselves.
(5) An even rarer group was able to get support right away mainly because there were others in their team that were educated overseas.
(6)

The above typology was created based on the findings and is supported by Amazan's (2011) research on diaspora mobility. The spectrum of this resistance/persistence scale does vary a bit from government agencies, to international organizations to NGOs. Those who work for the latter two tend to have more success with implementing their ideas. Those who are in government agencies tend to have success with implementing their skills if they are at senior level positions. Those who are being managed by supervisors that did not have an international experience tend to have more of a difficult time transitioning new ideas in or bringing them forward. This supports the training of multiple members, if not all, members of a particular group/team at a time in order to maximize the institutional impact/effect, which was suggested by multiple participants.

Those in category five explained their luck by the fact that they work in non-profit organization that tend to attract graduates from overseas. This is quite an interesting perspective as there is a pattern amongst those who are supported in the workplace by their supervisors who have studied overseas. There tended to be an unspoken understanding amongst them and alumni found it easier to implement new ideas and new ways of doing things–building more acceptances of their knowledge and skills. This also minimizes the professional jealousy amongst returnees and other colleagues. For instance MRNF works in a research institute with five people, where all of them have studied abroad and/or currently studying abroad, thus the level of expectation is quite similar amongst all her colleagues.

Participants who work with people who have similar experiences and qualifications overseas–more than one person with overseas skills, they reported their work being better and more productive. For instance UHAF is working with another alumnus and they found support in each other instead of seeing each other as threats. They work collaboratively and complement each other's skills at the same level in order to bring about change. UHAF and UAAF together have put in a proposal for a grant to initiate family support groups/psychosocial support for pregnant and/or breastfeeding mothers who are HIV positive.

Returnees do struggle with implementing what they have learned overseas; they face many challenges with institutional change mainly due to a rigid and inflexible system. It is not uncommon for returnees to "lose steam" and or revert to their "old ways" (see Amazan, 2011, 2014), whereby some of the effects of studying abroad in Australia are potentially eroded and/or lost. This could be a coping mechanism and/or survival strategy in order to avoid frustration or to simply maintain a level of sanity and self-preservation. Perseverance and persistence is the name of the game for returnees. There are many baby steps along the way (not necessarily forward) where alumni seek opportunities to sneak something new in – convincing one colleague here and there to buy into a new or different idea.

To be successful at implementing the skills and knowledge that alumni have learned, a conducive and supporting environment is critical. As one participant put it:

> *...to apply the knowledge and skills you have, you have to have a conducive environment. You have to be in a place where they are open to receiving your skills. So if you're in a place where they're a bit rigid, it's often hard to apply your knowledge and skills. But if you're in a place where they are flexible and you're dynamic and they are all about making change, then it's easy to apply your knowledge and skills. And you need a place where you can grow; where you can get exposed to different professionals. So it's about the organization where you're working that gives you those opportunities (UPBF).*

This sentiment was echoed throughout the interviews. Not having proper support could feel isolating and this could lead to frustration. A few of the participants were lucky to have a supportive environment to share their ideas with their colleagues. They felt more appreciated as they could see their colleagues listened to them and implemented their ideas.

Patience and time have also been cited as being important to navigating the system when trying to implement skills. Some participants' advice is to not be "*too pushy*" but also to not give up and keep trying to find ways to make things work. Sometimes leaving a current job and going to a new one was a good circuit breaker. Having a supervisor who have been overseas and/or have undertaken postgraduate training in Public Health also helped things along because s/he would have similar experiences and would be able to understand alumni's ideas and thought processes.

REINTEGRATION

Based on our study we have identified three possible reintegration processes. In a shorthand form these can be labelled: (1) adjust to the current situation, (2) readapt to the new reality, (3) do not readapt – constantly compare with overseas experience, and look for a way out.

It was suggested by some in our study that reintegration is different and is dependent on ones' previous workplace experience. Those who have returned to their previous workplace (mainly public servants), experience reintegration differently because they get a chance to test the waters so to speak with their new-found knowledge and skills. This brought them some time for testing and experimenting with what they really would like to

do without being out of work. Their previous job provides a laboratory space, a stage, if you will, to establish a new working identity, gaining confidence in their newly found knowledge and skills so when they are ready to venture off to bigger and better things they will be effective. Of course, it does not always work that way. It is evident from the data that participants had to move at least twice upon return to really find a place they really see themselves working for a long time, and even then some are not happy and continue to search for something better. Their expectations of what the degree would give them could have something to do with the constant move/search and perhaps even the urge to do something more significant, something greater for their country, building a legacy could also be driving that.

This platform could also work against them, because some participants in that situation find their previous workplace limiting. Also, they could find that their reputation and image (good or bad) before leaving could still be following them around, even though at times they want to break away from the old mould and construct new ones. Sometimes colleagues' perception of them is very hard to change. Participants who go back to their previous employer before their Master's degree found it harder, more challenging to implement change or even suggest new ideas and/or way of doing things. They found it challenging for people to accept them as having more to offer because they have changed, but their workplace have not. Breaking away from who they were prior to going overseas and establishing their new image is quite challenging. As one participant put it they,

> *…probably foresee you as just you've been away for a year and you think you can come and change this place around. But when I went to a neutral place, they were more open to ideas and more open to solutions. I guess that's why I thrived more there because… I was new to them, and they were open to ideas (UPBF).*

UPBF was struggling in her old job to bring change, but find her colleagues in her new job were willing to listen to her because they do not have a preconceived notion of her.

Competition & Saturation of qualified people

The hardest thing about coming back is not having a job, which was mainly the case for non-public servants. Alumni who left public service positions were often able to return to the same position they held prior to leaving. Overall, it took some time for participants to find a job where they can use their newly acquired skills and knowledge. Interestingly, the majority of participants quit their job without having any assurance of returning to their old job, but had confidence that they would find another job, possibly a better job, upon return. It varies from four months, three months, six months and as long as eight months. However, the early cohorts (2006, possibly prior) reported having a range of options to choose from – sometimes they had trouble picking what they want to do, which was not so with the later cohorts.

Participants who stayed in touch with their former employer cited having an easier, smooth time transitioning back into the system. They were able to keep up to date with new projects and needs of their former employer and, as a result, were invited to start up or lead new projects in different areas. Those who kept in touch were offered a position before going back which put them at ease. This is an important determining factor in reintegrating and transiting into the workforce.

There are various factors contributing to not finding a job right away. One is timing as jobs tend to be advertised at the beginning of the year. Another might be lack of access to information about job vacancies being widely available and/or advertised only internally. In the case of clinical doctors who pursuit a public health degree–lack of experience in public health was cited as a factor for not finding a job. Previous employers could not afford to employ alumni sometimes due to reduction in funding. However, several participants had difficulty finding a job because the employer thought they were overqualified–so they did not hire them. In MMQF's case, she was willing to take anything because she was looking for nearly four months and found nothing. In the other cases like UCKF she omitted her Master's degree from her CV and did not mention it during her interview. Her current employer still does not know about her Master's degree. She said, "I would be over-qualified for the job I'm doing right now and I mean I would rather be working some place as I look for opportunity instead of just sitting at home."

As stated before, the earlier cohorts had no difficulties finding a job; there were plenty of opportunities and options for them. When they returned back with a Master's degree they were recognized highly for their achievements and were rewarded with senior level jobs. The level of competition was low because there were not many professionals with Master's degrees at administrative health and those with a Master's were offered/appointed to high paying positions. Thus, it is understandable that the same level of expectation is still in existence. Many have witnessed this and hope a Master's degree overseas would give them the same level of success, however, things have changed. There are more qualified people with postgraduate degrees in Public Health from overseas and Masters in this area are more accessible in country. As a result more people are qualified at a higher level, increasing competition for senior level positions.

Some participants commented on how their field was saturated with the qualification they have obtained making it difficult to get a job in the area or use their skills and knowledge they have obtained. As one participant put it, "...the job market here is very competitive. People here are well studied and one thing I've noticed that when you're applying for a job, you're not the only one with Masters of Public Health. We have universities here that are teaching public health. It's hard to get a job" (UPBF). As a result, some alumni are finding themselves enrolling in another degree in order to compete in a job market with qualification inflation. As expressed by one participant, "…competition gets tougher and gets tougher, so people then decide to do a second master's degree" (UMKF).

Now, you need more than an international qualification to secure a job. An overseas qualification might get you through the doors, but it will not necessarily guarantee you the job like it used to. The earlier cohort reminisce about the good old days when they returned back how there were so many opportunities opened up to them, organizations would seek them out not the other way around. So, in essence, the earlier cohorts did have it easier in terms of finding a well-paying job, which met their increased expectations. Thus, the later cohorts are absolutely right in their assessment that the saturation of qualified people makes it harder for them to find a job upon return and as a result it is harder for them to meet their expectations. It is important to acknowledge here the complex issues to do with the managing of supply and demand of labour. We also recognized that some of the mechanism employed to manage that issue are ineffective.

However, to the competitive nature of the market, and also the increased number of qualified Public Health workers, it is believed by some that 'who you know' can make that difference. It is used to be that an overseas degree, an Australian degree would give you an edge, a lead when applying for a job; however, some believe that is no longer the case:

> *...it's more about who do you know; who can recommend you" (UPBF).*
> *"...I've applied to quite many [jobs] and it's really been competitive.*
> *Even getting the one [job] where I am right now was recommendation.*
> *Like someone who had gone to Australia was there and she's actually*
> *recommending me. But if it wasn't for that, I don't think would haven't*
> *a job. 'Cause I've been trying other jobs and wasn't successful (UPBF).*

This participant applied for 60 jobs and she was shortlisted for only 12 and finally got the job she is in now due to a recommendation. She is convinced that was the reason she got the job. It is important for alumni to position themselves for opportunities. Widening one's network is an important aspect of getting a top job. This finding has some implications for the Australian government's approach to alumni networks and chosen focus areas.

Alumni network

Most alumni, if not all, have maintained contact with people who were in the same cohort as them or who went to the same university. This link or bond that is formed before and/or during their candidature in Australia is maintained, and so is very strong, even after returning back home. Some have regular meetings and events outside the network to catch up and share experiences. Others would like to be more involved, but distance and time of the meetings are an issue. These regular cohort meetings have been used as a way to cope with the situation of finding a job, fitting back in the system again, giving each other support and ideas about where and what to look for and at times used to alleviate anxiety about the unknown. Many have used their cohort support network to find jobs and deal with the everyday difficulties with reintegration. As one participant put it, "…it [cohort group] helped us, really get our feet back on the ground" (UMKF).

However, the majority of the participants are not active in the Australia Alumni Network. In both Uganda and Mozambique network activities seem to have fizzled out. The reasons for this are complex and beyond the scope of this paper. Partly, it could be due to the fact that the network themselves are not being actively maintained. Organizers found that there is not that much participation in events. It is understood by the alumni that the purpose of the network is to promote the scholarship, help potential applicants by guiding them and by sharing their experiences. However that may be missing the mark. The focus of the alumni network is perhaps part of the problem. As one participant put it:

> *...the Australian government is really focused on the application*
> *process and not so much in the re-integration process. ... people come*
> *back with a Master's or a PhD and what they do with their PhD is not*
> *their (Australia's) business anymore. [There] is a critical mass and*
> *most of the time it's not well... used especially by the Australian*
> *government and the Mozambican government… (MSPM).*

Thus, there is more work to be done on the follow up and re-embedding processes.

Several participants mentioned the possibility of research and small seed grants which could be a way to motivate members to participate in the network. It was also suggested that perhaps the Alumni Networks, if run properly, could be used to link up recent returnees with those who have been back for some time to help them figure out what to do, which step to take next. They could play a mentoring role. It was also suggested that the Australian government engage the alumni fresh out, as when you are fresh out you may be more willing to contribute and participate in network activities.

The Alumni Networks can definitely play a bigger role in easing the hardships and difficulties that alumni face upon return. Interactions and contacts amongst alumni can really help countries to really get the most out of their alumni as well as helping alumni themselves to build a network of support by sharing experiences and discussing challenges (work, personal, etcetera). By sharing upcoming job opportunities alumni are in better position to persist and resist whilst trying to implement their skills. This in itself could be the beginning of maintaining sustainability in the knowledge sharing/production process. As one participant put it, "I don't want to lean on Australia and lean on Australia and lean on Australia. ...You have given us a fishing rod and it's time for us to use the fishing rod" (UAAF). As noted, this evolution is complexly related to the re-calibration of the quasi-colonial relationship between Australia and its recipient countries.

The bottom line is more support is needed to strengthen the alumni networks. This could also be a way for Australia to strengthen its involvement with the countries. There needs to be more investment in building a stronger network as it is instrumental in continuing to build new way of thinking and encouraging different processes. As respondent NROM argued, proper structures need to be put in place in order to "allow more stabilization of knowledge exchange, knowledge building process" (NROM).

However, it is not only about the Australian government, it is also about the alumni. Some of the participants think the Australian government can help to support alumni initiatives and activities. However, presumably, alumni also need to be proactive and take the necessary initiative to make things happen. One could argue that they need to take the lead. Against that, work and family commitments (more so for women than men) may make this very difficult, even at times nearly impossible.

Overall, a functional network is very important to successful communication between the stakeholders; governments, alumni, current students and potential students. However, networks that wax and wane bring compounding problems. The irregularities of meetings and under-resourcing do not help with keeping everyone in the loop. The importance of building the Alumni networks in the country is critical, especially when it is coupled with the alumni's drive and focus toward change on the ground.

CONCLUSION

In general terms, we re-state that Australian scholarship awards had a positive impact on African alumni's livelihood. On the whole, they were also viewed favourably by employers, family, friends and community. Many respondents experienced promotions

and pay rises due to their overseas degree. Almost all respondents stated that their experience in Australia had changed their practice and their views.

There is strong evidence to suggest the Australian scholarship awards contribute to changes in the way alumni think about things both in their professional and social life. There are many obstacles and challenges that the alumni deal with on a regular basis whereby a support network is needed for them to know that they are not alone, and that there are others fighting the same fight. The will and drive of Alumni may fade away if they get isolated from each other and/or if they feel they are alone in bringing change. The Alumni Network can be used as a space to empower and build up alumni's resilience to continue 'fighting the good fight'. Again, this is a two-way street and the full benefits depend partly upon personal agency. The alumni need to take the lead, and to be proactive in changing their circumstances.

The main challenges encountered by returnees were concerned with implementation of skills and difficulties in finding a job where they can use their knowledge and skills acquired. There was a level of frustration because the majority are in jobs where their training is not related to their current position or role. Thus, there is a mismatch between their knowledge and skills acquired and the local realities. Thus, there are unintended blockages at the implementation stage when people return to their home country and meet resistance or even disguised hostility. They struggle to get back into the local way and sometimes feel that they have to be careful to not alienate others. It was also found that the national and departmental policies and bureaucratic control were big indicators in alumni success. Clearly, individual qualifications and expertise are not enough on their own to bring about wider change. Further we should remind ourselves of the previously mentioned complexities around the supply and demand of labour, and the limits of individual's effectiveness in relation to national economy.

Overall, participants in our study strongly believe the Australia Africa scholarships contributed substantially to the improvement and quality of their life. However, the extent to which the Australia Africa scholarship increased access to those who would have otherwise not had the opportunity to study in Australia and/or overseas is questionable. Without a doubt, there are many benefits (e.g. lasting bonds) of providing scholarships for students to study overseas. However, the credentialist inflation in qualifications in Public Health, and the fact that many alumni struggle to find a job in their area of speciality, is a set of problems that still needs addressing.

It is difficult to say for sure the degree to which participants attribute their accomplishments/ or successes directly to receiving an Australian Award. As noted, it is made more complex by the fact that some of them, prior to studying in Australia, already had senior level positions. Even if the scholarship increased the alumni's employability and made them more dynamic in their field we still cannot know what the person would have achieved without the scholarship. This does not invalidate the idea of scholarships per se.

All in all, we have tried to take stock of the positives and the negatives of this complex phenomenon. In the end we feel our qualitative findings made an important empirical contribution to knowledge. We argue that with complex social phenomena such as this we need a relational analysis which understands the larger structures, (such as policy, national and social development) as well as the situated/lived realities of individual lives.

Therefore, any conversation about whether scholarships are good or bad has to distinguish between societal benefits and individual ones, remembering of course that these are not automatically the same thing. For example, a scholarship might be very good for the individual, whilst still not benefitting the country in the way it should. Further, the individual may only see this on an occasional basis, if at all. On the whole, though, we found most alumni were reflective about this national agenda and aware that it was complexly related to their own progress.

Finally, we are aware of potential limitations of this small study of qualitative data and of the problem of theorizing from this base. However, we have found some important glimpses in this empirical work. Such 'texture' is theoretically essential. The firsthand accounts unearthed processes without which any informed discussion of Australia Africa Scholarships cannot proceed.

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