

Capitalizing on diaspora: From “Brain drain” to “Brain gain” : Moroccan case study and Asian (benchmarking) paradigm

***Mohamed Boudoudou
Sociologist, Faculty of Humanities.
University Mohammed V
Rabat. Morocco***

“You can take migrants out of their country but you can’t take their country out of them”

General context

it is established, after almost half a century of contemporary international migration and accompanied academic research, that all attempts, by both countries of emigration and immigration, to draw nationals living abroad to make a somehow “happy coming back” to the home country, as a lever for the former of drawing back the number of migrants mainly for internal politics gains, and for the latter of attracting talents and investments in the development process, acting henceforth on the assumption that the “patriotic call” is to be determinant in producing the desired behaviour from these proved patriotic nationals, never materialises in fact as expected despite some financial incentives in this regard.

This sums up the discourses of both emigration and immigration countries, regarding their expectations of the emigration and immigration policies implemented during the first decades of the post WWII era of reconstruction of Europe and post-independence nation-building for emigration countries, notably in the Maghreb area.

1- From labour migration to “brain drain”

As all these previous strategies failed over time to materialize significantly for both emigration and immigration countries, quite the opposite happened indeed, “integration” (an euphemism in fact for sociological and legal “assimilation”-this latter concept is historically so sensitive an issue due to its colonial background) become for immigration countries the strategic issue regarding their immigration policy. And, the more so, from the very moment the so-called “second” and “third” generations become socially and politically visible, while correlatively to this process, significant numbers of highly educated and skilled human resources originally educated in their home country were to be lured in making a choice of overstaying their high education period, because of incentives ranging from relatively highly paid jobs to better conditions of living in an industrialised country. In effect, a situation which allows for attracting more and more valuable human resources either as students migrants or students still in the country. In short, all of which that led the critics to draw the conclusion that is coined in the “brain drain” paradigm.

2- “Brain Gain” paradigm

Since the ninetieth of the twentieth century, another assumption regarding the same issue has arisen that tend to prove that what seems to be an exclusively “brain drain” process can also be made as a “brain gain”, if only interested countries can formulate the relevant strategy regarding what will be considered, henceforth, as attractiveness of “Human Capital”. Especially so, since it becomes known for a fact that any strengthening of bonds between migrants and their home country is no longer determined by the “symbolics” of cultural belonging alone-though still highly relevant, but also more significantly by economics. And, the more so, in a globalising world where the effects of mobility of capital and labour are the most significant dynamics in contemporary world economy.

Moroccan political economy had therefore to adjust to this latter paradigm of development allowing for the participation of all, national and international, actors into the dynamics of “economic growth”. Notwithstanding the determinant role of “human development” in the economic growth as such (hence, Morocco’s “National Initiative for Human Development” -Program), we now know, more than ever before, that, for this economic growth to be effective, remains, nonetheless, fundamentally based, worldwide, on systematic promotion of all levers of “attractiveness” for national and international financial and human capital.

Hence, the emphasis in the building process of an integrated “image – promotion”, on the “fundamentals of investment”, that are in the Moroccan case:

- ***Geostrategic positioning***
- ***Grands structuring projects***
- ***An open and liberal economy***
- ***Human and material capital***

2-1 Moroccan Diaspora and Economic Promotion

It is within this framework that the latest action, as related to the “brain gain” paradigm, took place recently in Rabat¹, as it was dedicated to the “Moroccan Investors of the World”, that are “*Moroccans residing abroad (MRA) and who are already significantly contributing to the economic and social development of Morocco, in increasingly sophisticated ways*”. It is indeed established that Morocco belongs into a pattern of countries that are making the most in terms of international migration remittances:

¹ The fundamentals of Investment 2007: Moroccan Investors in the World-Players in Economic Diplomacy, 13-14 December 2007, Skhirat-Rabat.(Department of Investment)

Recent evolution and economic weight of Moroccan Residents Abroad: remittances

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Transferts des MRE (en millions de dirhams)	19310,9	19001,5	22961,6	36858,1	31707,9	34581,8	37422,5	40737,7	47858,9
Transferts des MRE/PIB	5,02	4,87	5,83	8,63	7,11	7,25	7,48	7,8	8,25
Transferts MRE/Exportations	28,15	25,81	29,13	45,7	36,7	41,22	43,33	41,03	42,86
Transferts MRE/Importations	19,57	17,94	18,74	29,42	24,23	25,41	23,94	22,1	23,12
Transferts MRE / Déficit commercial	64,22	58,8	52,54	82,65	71,33	66,27	53,51	47,86	50,2
Transferts MRE/Investissements directs étrangers			459,44	113,46	539,63	148,7	394,55	155,87	190,87
Transferts MRE/Dette extérieure			8,56	12,86	11,16	11,9	12,72	12,44	14,48

Source : Office des Change, Haut Commissariat au Plan

Hence, the three main objectives of the 5th edition of the Fundamentals of Investment organised by the Department of Investment, as follows:

- 1- *To contribute to the national debate on the different roles that can be played by Moroccans abroad, within the broader context of economic development in Morocco;*
- 2- *To share conclusions, at the international level, on the role of diasporas on investment promotion and to identify the main lines of a national policy reflecting Moroccan specificities and priorities;*
- 3- *To study investment promotion mechanisms [networking, associations, etc...], where Moroccans residing abroad can function as **economic diplomats** to promote the economy of their country”*

In this perspective, thirteen high profile “**economic diplomats**” have been indeed selected for this purpose with the expectation that this new initiative would generate added value to the state’s promotion of Moroccan economy, this time, by its nationals living and performing in different economical and scientific fields abroad.

2-2 Moroccan Diasporas and Scientific-Technological Transfer

Bearing in mind that no genuine development is conceivable anymore without it being based on knowledge and know how capabilities/ capacities locally (i.e endogenously), and the more so in a globalising world based on knowledge-based economy and society, the aim is to make this ideal of shared interests in international migration happening in developing countries with significant diasporas abroad, in as significant a way as what has been historically achieved, for example, by Asian countries (Japan, Korea, Honk Kong, Singapore, China, India ...etc), especially regarding their Diasporas significant participation in their successive development processes.

Morocco initiated a strategy of scientific knowledge and technology transfer scheme, following the launch in Rabat, in 1993 (to 1996) of U N D P's Tokten program (*Transfer of knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals*). This latter aim was to mobilize emigration and immigration countries as well as the concerned migrants for the progressive implementation of the "brain gain" paradigm.

This was to be indeed a conscience raising process for the necessary shift from the negative assessment of international migration process, namely as an exclusively "brain drain", to a more positive one, that is a "brain gain", with regard to the significant potential contribution of skilled migrants in their countries of origin, notably through networking and short sojourns in universities and research laboratories.

An exemplary case that materialises in France, is an association called "*Savoir et Development*" (*knowledge and Development*) that has been established in 1999, comprising 200 members and focuses on high impact projects and the elaboration of a relevant data base.

As a follow up, another implementation measure was to be a network building scheme on the net, known as Fincome.ma (*International Forum of Moroccan competences abroad*), following the "First International Meeting in Casablanca of Moroccan Competences Abroad", in 2007.

The aim is for this virtual network to function as an intermediation tool between Moroccan competences abroad and their country's public and private organisations, in order to effectively create links that could materialise in projects related to the priorities of Moroccan development strategy:

It's obviously still too early to assess the full effects of such measure, since we also know that an internet based network has to be built on credibility and sustainability over time.

2-3 “Political Capital” Investment in emigration-immigration integrated strategy

As a complementary measure in this systematic and integrated approach, that is to be established as a realistic set of incentives for both keeping strong bonds between Moroccan migrants and their home country as well as bolstering the important role of Moroccan communities abroad in the development of Moroccan economy, Moroccan Head of the State (S.M Mohammed VI) has recently (21-12-07) nominates 50 high profile members belonging to Moroccan diasporas worldwide, after one year large consultations with main actors in Moroccan communities abroad, as well as to national Institutions that are already engaged with migrants, for the establishment of a “Counsel of Moroccan Residents Abroad” (2007).

This latter shall thrive to establish norms, rules and mechanisms for a credible and representative functioning body especially dedicated to Moroccan migrants’ interests within Moroccan institutions, Immigration countries institutions and International Institutions as well. It will have, then, to be democratically elected after an experimental phase of four years.