

# The labour movement on jamaican economy economics essay

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The history of the labour movement in Jamaica dates back to the early 17th century. Since then Jamaicans have contributed to first world economies such as the United States, Canada and United Kingdom, causing a massive brain drain in the country. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the impact of the brain drain movement on Jamaican economy. This paper will also seek to do a comparative analysis with emerging issues and challenges facing Jamaica and other Caribbean countries specifically Trinidad and Tobago. The incorporation of Robert Hanvey's theoretical framework will be used to make a pedagogical connection. The following questions will be used to guide the discussion: Does the labour movement have a negative impact on Jamaica's economy and prime talent pool? Is Trinidad and Tobago immune to "brain drain"?

## **Conceptual Framework**

Hanvey (1976) provides a robust theoretical explanation on how individuals view themselves in the context of their environment. His theory extends to look at how an individual perspective may change as the person is exposed to different perspectives and different cultures. Exposure to new ways of thinking may inspire life changing decisions as the individual processes information about new opportunities. Hanvey breaks down his framework into five dimensions. These are: perspective consciousness, state of the planet awareness, cross cultural awareness, awareness of global dynamics and awareness of human choices. Perspective consciousness. The first dimension, according to Hanvey (1976) is perspective consciousness which examines the recognition or awareness on the part of the individual that he or she has a view of the world that is not universally shared, that this view of

the world has been and continues to be shaped by influences that often escape conscious detection, and that others have views of the world that are profoundly different from one's own. Within this dimension the individual develops a perspective of the world based on the combination of genetics and social experiences. Overtime, individuals understand and appreciate that their perspective is fairly unique and may not be the global norm.

Perspective consciousness is extremely relevant in cases of migration. This level of consciousness allows the individual to mentally explore other possibilities such as visiting or moving to other countries. For example, I was raised in a small family setting in St. Andrew. Through education and secondary socialization I was exposed to other possibilities in life. I was then driven to explore these possibilities. These experiences have set the stage for later migration. This kind of consciousness allows persons to transition to other stages of consciousness. In other words perspective consciousness piques curiosity and drives the individual to obtain greater exposure to other perspectives and cultures. Perspective consciousness opens the door to another dimension explained by (Hanvey, 1976). The author explains that human beings experience a state called cross cultural awareness. Cross culture awareness. Hanvey (1976) postulated that cross culture awareness represents the " awareness of the diversity of ideas and practices to be found in human societies around the world". He further stated that, such ideas and practices may be compared to one's own and that basic awareness can provide " some limited recognition of how the ideas and ways of one's own society might be viewed from other vantage points". For example, after travelling to Florida on my field trip I have been exposed to

life in an American institution and in the American society. This experience allowed me to deeply process the cultural nuances of the American society. Initially I had a problem eating the food and adjusting to other norms and cultural practices. For me, it was a " culture shock". However, at the end of my trip I started to acquire the taste of different non Jamaican recipes. I also developed a greater appreciation for the methods of interaction while operating in America. These adjustments, along with the fact that I may soon obtained international qualifications, triggered further curiosity about life in America and other foreign countries. Migration is only a stone throw away. Awareness of Human Choices. According to Hanvey (1976) this dimension speaks to some awareness of the problems of choice confronting individuals, nations, and the human species as consciousness and knowledge of the global system expands. Within this dimension options are opened to individuals. The person will be in a position to choose the path that provides the best outcome. Information gathered through enlightenment will inform the decision. Original fears due to lack of knowledge would have subsided because of exposure. The individual becomes more accepting of the new possibilities and there is greater optimism towards the way ahead. This is where the individual may choose to migrate in search of better opportunities.

### **Global citizenship: Who am I?**

I was born in the Parish of St. Andrew in a small family setting. This included my mother, father, 2 sisters and 2 brothers. I was the third child for my parents. We attended the St. Joseph Anglican church within the extended community of Grove. I attended Roman Catholic educational institutions from preschool to the high school level. These experiences helped to expand my

horizon and to create greater perspective awareness. My community was a lower middle class community. Members of my community were constantly seeking ways to expand their opportunities and to obtain a better standard of living. Over the years many of these individuals migrated to the US, Canada, and the UK. My first encounter with migration was when my older brother migrated to England on a scholarship to achieve higher education. At first this was destabilizing for my family, as my brother was the main connector. Personally I had lost a big brother, a role model and a protector. This however, inspired me to learn more about foreign countries and cultures. In short I developed a greater cultural awareness. This awareness was further nurtured when my brother and his new family made numerous visits to Jamaica. These visits, as well as visits from other migrants impacted my outlook as well as the perspective of my family and the immediate community. Almost every family in Jamaica has experienced the threat of migration, as members of their family seek to find a better standard of living. The benefit of migration in this occurs where remittances flow in to provide economic assistance for families. This experience is similar to that of many families across Jamaica. Migration has provided significant economic benefits through remittances sent from the US, Canada and the UK. Remittance and tourism revenues are the two biggest foreign exchange earners for Jamaica and many other Caribbean countries. Despite the positive impact of migration, there are some negatives. Individuals such as my brother are a part of the most skilful section of the Jamaican Labour Force. The absence of these individuals over the years has weakened the quality of leadership and management available to Jamaican families, communities and the society at

large. This impact has also been evident in other countries within the Caribbean region. This has made me an opened minded person to appreciate what the world has to offer.

## **Historical Background**

Jamaica has experienced high levels of migration since the 17th century. Most Jamaicans followed available employment opportunities in the region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Since then there has been an increasing momentum of migration by youth, women and men in the mid-20th century (Chappell & Glennie, 2010). The authors posit that advertisement, inducement and recruitment have played a key role in migration in the past, especially in initiating the movement of particular groups of professionals such nurses and teachers to developed countries. The current practice was to target both skilled adult workers and tertiary students within developing countries. According to Thomas-Hope (2004), Jamaicans leave their country because poor economic opportunities around them, where they cannot foreseeable any future. Additionally political anxiety, fear, crime, poverty and poor government policies also contribute to the large scale of Jamaicans who migrate. She further noted that Jamaicans migrate to United States, United Kingdom, Canada, other Caribbean Island and all across the Caribbean Coast of Central America to pursue economic benefits and to achieve a better quality of life.

## **Labour Force in Context**

The World Bank (2012) report explains that the Labour force comprises of people ages 15 and older who meet the International Labour Organization

definition of the economically active population. This includes all people who supply labour for the production of goods and services during a specified period. The report further explains that both the employed and the unemployed are included. In general the labour force includes the armed forces, the unemployed and first-time job-seekers, but excludes homemakers and other unpaid caregivers and workers in the informal sector. According to the Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN, 2012), the Jamaican Labour Force stood at 1, 261, 100 in October 2012, an increase of 12, 600 persons (1. 0%) over the 1, 248, 500 in October 2011. The movement between July and October 2012 was an increase of 5, 100 persons (0. 4%).

## **Brain drain in Context**

Brain drain can be defined as the loss of skilled intellectual and technical labour through the movement of such labour to more favourable geographic, economic, or professional environments (The American Heritage® Dictionary, 2000). Dr Rustomjee (as cited in Jamaica Observer, 2012) noted that Jamaica has one of the highest rates of migration of persons with tertiary education among Commonwealth countries. He further pointed out that the loss of skilled migrants such as nurses and teachers was countered by remittance flows, which are " a very valuable source of household income for small states". Reynolds (2012) concurs that " the migration profile highlighted that the vast majority of Jamaican migrants were able-bodied and skilled persons, between ages 15 and 64". He also highlighted that 168, 700 persons migrated over the 2011 Population and Housing Census period.

## **The Jamaican Economy**

Hughes (2006) posits that any analysis of the Jamaican economy over the last 20 years has to be within the context of globalization. He explained that globalization here refers to the increased flow of trade, capital, information, skills and values across national borders. Hughes (2006) reiterated that globalization is a powerful force that is driven by technological, social and political changes along with the influence of multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. According to the Central Intelligence Agency World fact book (2013), the Jamaican economy is heavily dependent on services, which now account for nearly 65% of GDP. The report further stipulated that the country continues to derive most of its foreign exchange from tourism, remittances, and bauxite/alumina. Remittances account for nearly 15% of GDP and exports of bauxite and alumina make up about 10%. The bauxite/alumina sector was most affected by the global downturn that commenced in 2008, while the tourism industry was resilient, experiencing an increase of 4% in tourist arrivals. The report revealed that tourism revenues account for roughly 10% of GDP, and both arrivals and revenues grew in 2010, up 4% and 6% respectively. Jamaica, like most of the global economy, has undergone profound structural changes over the last two decades with the economy becoming significantly integrated into the global economy.

## **Trinidad and Tobago Economy**

Trinidad and Tobago comprises two main islands situated just seven kilometres off the coast of Venezuela. Access to education remains unequal

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and a tendency among highly educated individuals to leave the country to pursue careers abroad has created a "brain drain" in Trinidad and Tobago (Reis, 2007). He further noted that a study conducted by OCED in 2005 revealed that the outward migration of graduates and skilled workers from Trinidad stands at 57.2% and over 75% respectively. The emigration of skilled labour, particularly of teachers, doctors and nurses (medical brain drain), is a major hindrance in the development process of the country. Like most Caribbean territories, Trinidad and Tobago is plagued by alarming rates of brain drain, both in terms of skilled workers, professionals, and university graduates. This has resulted in the inability to meet labour demands in the services and manufacturing sector, construction, energy sector, medical profession and teaching service. In addition to losing highly qualified workers, the vast majority of migrants are generally in the most productive age group, 20-45 years old.

### **Comparative Analysis**

The comparison between Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica has shown that both developing countries have experienced brain drain throughout their history. Taking a closer look at both countries the Central Intelligence Agency World fact book (2013) outlined that Jamaica has a population of 2.8 million, more than twice the size of Trinidad and Tobago at 1.3 million. Trinidad, however, has a much stronger economy with a GDP of \$21 billion, relative to Jamaica's \$13 billion GDP. The strength of the Trinidad and Tobago GDP is influenced by the oil and energy sector, and also a robust manufacturing sector. Despite the strength of the economy, however, Trinidad and Tobago still suffers from extreme brain drain. Additionally, 11.2

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out of every 1000 persons from Trinidad and Tobago migrate while Jamaica has 5.88 migrants out of every 1000 persons. Trinidad also suffers a fairly large migration within their tertiary education population. The emigration rate of tertiary educated to total tertiary educated population in Trinidad and Tobago is 79%. This is lower than the 85% reflected for Jamaica. Both ratios are high and suggest that the highly educated are looking towards migration opportunities as the natural progression to obtain the best quality of life for their qualifications. In 2012 Central Intelligence Agency World fact book (2013) stated that Trinidad and Tobago had a significant emigration rate of 9.92% in 2000. Between 2000 and 2008 when there was good economic growth in countries such as the United States, the emigration rate increased steadily to a high of 11.13% in 2007. At the start of the Global recession in 2008, there was a slight decline in emigration to 11.2%. As the large economies continue to reflect a slowdown in economic activity, there has been a sharp decline in Trinidad and Tobago's emigration rate. The rate of migration was only 6.76% in 2012. These trends suggest that, despite the relatively good standing of the Trinidad and Tobago economy, there seems to be a high positive correlation between the growth of major economies such as the US and the rate of emigration out of Trinidad and Tobago. This suggests that Trinidadians are moving to secure economic improvements. In the case of Jamaica, the Central Intelligence Agency World fact book (2013) migration rate declined between 2000 and 2005. The rate increased in 2006, and there has been a trend decline in the rate since then. This suggests that, unlike Trinidad and Tobago, there is not as strong a correlation between the strength of the global economy and Jamaica's migration patterns. Generally,

the migration levels in Jamaica have been lower than that of Trinidad and Tobago, and there has been a trend decline in the rate in recent years. However, it must be pointed out that the cumulative diaspora population outside of Jamaica is significant relative to Jamaica's current population size (close to 100%).

## **Problems**

Dennis (2009) defined migration as the movement of people from one place to another. Migration can be international (movement between different countries) or internal (movement within a country, often from rural to urban areas). The author further explains that migration can take the form of Economic migration that involves moving to find work or follow a particular career path; or other types of migration such as social or political. As established above, people migrate for many different reasons. The Planning Institute of Jamaica (2010) reported that Jamaica continues to experience a high level of international migration which is being increasingly influenced by demographic, social, economic and political factors. Within this context economic migration involves moving to find work or follow a particular career path and for a better quality of life. People, however, may migrate to seek social and political benefits. The departure of the better educated in the Caribbean has left considerable gaps in many public service institutions, including in the health and education sectors, and increasingly also in the information technology (IT) sector. In addition, it is important to consider not only the effects of the loss in productivity brought on by the migration of highly-skilled migrants from the Caribbean, but the diminished efficiency and capacity of the ones that stay behind as well. The remaining labour force

can be overwhelmed by the excessive demand for goods and services, and are no longer able to benefit from the transfer of knowledge, monitoring and motivation that may have been provided by the more highly-skilled workers who have left. Additionally the increasing government expenditure on education creates a strain on the economy to educate individuals who are left. This problem has emerged since skilled workers' contribution to the economic growth has resulted in the loss of productivity and to the level of gross domestic product. Both Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago has been impacted by these issues.

## **Analysis**

The trend toward migration has contributed to the greater level of globalization. Marber (2013) explained globalization as a term that "encompasses all cross-border interaction, whether economic, political, or cultural" (p. 66). He further posits that globalization has improved and increase literacy rated in developing countries and now these countries have far more educated population with greater intellectual capacity than before. More and more, individuals from developing countries such as Jamaica and other Caribbean states have been moving to more developed destinations in search of a better life. This has led to increased cultural integration and cross fertilization of value systems. Migration on the international scale has made the world " flat" through the wide scope of globalization. According to Banya (2010) individuals with the necessary qualifications and experiences have migrated to where employments are accessible. Due to globalization higher education is now at an International standard. This has significantly increased the number of students at the tertiary level to search for better

opportunity. Hence, migration has filled the skills gap in the international landscape. Marber (2013) explained that the loss of skilled and educated individuals to developed countries cripples the economic growth of the developing countries as their workforce are not equipped to produce, export and invest. They however, import commodities that place a greater strain their economy. He further stated that overtime the wealthier and developed countries will progress through cross border trade and continue to upgrade their workforce to produce and export more commodities and improve their economy. The loss of a skilled population has had negative effects on industries, social development and cultural development in developing countries.

### **Does the labour movement have a negative impact on Jamaica's economy and prime talent pool?**

In recent years, overseas recruitment agencies have wooed specialist teachers to the US, Canada, UK and even Japan. For example, in 2008 a US-based recruitment agency, Teachers Council, said it was seeking 300 teachers with majors in special education, early childhood education, elementary mathematics, biology, physical education, art, music and Spanish. Such drives have weakened Jamaica's education sector which had already been plagued with shortage of qualified specialist teachers. The Jamaica Teachers' Association (JTA) at the time indicated that more attractive compensation packages (US\$3, 500 potential earnings in the US, compared to equivalent of US\$1, 000 earned in Jamaica) and better-resourced institutions were the big drawing cards which lured teachers away from Jamaica. The JTA also noted that teachers were also willing to migrate

because they were frustrated with the high incidence of violence in schools. The movement of skilled professionals is explained by Harvey's framework that describes perspective consciousness, state of the planet awareness, cross cultural awareness, awareness of global dynamics and awareness of human choices. This framework explains how the professionals may decide to emigrate.

## **Recommendation**

The growth and complexity of migration trends call for the design and implementation of migration management strategies that optimize gains and minimize losses. The emphasis should be on obtaining the maximum benefits from the " migration value chain" that encompasses upstream activities such as education and training to downstream activities such as financial networks associated with remittances. Key policy measures with regard to extra- and intra-regional migration are mentioned below:

Implementation of skill-targeted education and training programmes in secondary and tertiary institutions in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

Proactive facilitation of replacement migration via intra-regional migration programmes in our tertiary institutions in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

Facilitation of the transnational circulation of skills within our vocational programme and tourism industry in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

Widening and deepening of diaspora networks in countries our migrants resides. Collection of basic migration data for a migrant management policy to monitor and evaluate the reasons of migration and how to counteract and decrease the number of persons who migrate.

## **Conclusion**

Measuring the impact of migration at the national level either in the short and medium term or more so in the long-term, is very difficult. Despite the benefits of migration it can undermine important aspects of development over the long term. It is therefore important that such tendencies be recognized and understood so that they may be countered in positive and proactive ways. Furthermore, when considering the impact of migration, one has to take into account that both outward and inward flows are comprised not solely of people but also of all forms of capital - economic, cultural and social. It is therefore imperative that the brain drain movement is fully monitored in order to control the loss of skilled talented individuals. If no mechanisms are in place to assess the medium- and long-term effect on Jamaica's development then Jamaican's economy will continue to be under the negative attack of migration.