

Region Needs To Take Rap For Causes Of Brain Drain

THE article "New Plan to Stem Brain Drain", published in the *The Namibian* of Friday 3 August 2001, presented a very one-sided view of an issue which has grown steadily over a number of years.

There are many natural and organic causes for the exodus of qualified and skilled individuals from any country at any given time. The migration of skills is a normal phenomenon, which is not peculiar to sub-Saharan Africa or the SADC region in particular.

The region, as a whole, needs to take responsibility for many of the real causes, which have contributed to, and exacerbated the situation.

It is true that many of our highly qualified and skilled people are looking further afield for new challenges and the opportunities to interact in what is perceived to be more vibrant employment environments and are accessing technologies and scientific advances which are not readily available domestically. This is the natural ebb and flow of acquiring quality expertise and experience.

But there are aspects which the article does not address.

There are, at this time, many highly qualified, skilled and experienced graduates in Namibia, who remain undeployed. The reasons for this situation are many and some are complex.

Not all of these people are from the previously privileged classes and we need to consider why it is that the focus now falls on the very issue which is turning in on itself. Some reasons are covered below.

• There are groupings of young Namibians who believe that they own the monopoly on eligibility, lack of qualifications and experience notwithstanding. Since 1990 many of

these upwardly mobile, liberated groups have done what they could, for whatever reason, to prevent positions from becoming contested territory in the open market.

• In some instances suitable candidates are rejected for positions because the management levels who are engaged in the decision-making processes are less qualified and experienced and are themselves shown up for their lack of expertise. This happens all over the world and is not only a domestic problem.

• In our young and inexperienced democracy the fact of a visible political opposition, which delivers different shades of opinion, has yet to take root with any real meaning or currency, and until that happens party-political factors will continue to muddy the water. This is also a universal phenomenon.

• Racism is another issue, which the post-liberation struggle leaders are loath to acknowledge. There was a time when candidates were not "white" enough for certain positions, and now certain people are not "black" enough, or of the "wrong" ethnic persuasion. Ethnicity, compounded by political alle-

giances, do not make for equitable resolutions of any social problems. This happens elsewhere as well.

• In South Africa, as an example, there are individuals in the education sector who have lost positions due to the closing of certain institutions, and who are still on the state's payroll, but who have not been deployed elsewhere. Taxpayers are supporting these qualified and experienced people while they languish at home, while those very taxpayers have children who desperately need teachers!! No one expects first time governments to get it right every time! Acknowledging that they do sometimes fail would create a friendlier social landscape, of course.

This is the weird fallout from our own actions, so why cry wolf now? Is it not time to refocus on what it is that we contribute to the "brain drain"? Why should the region have to invest millions of dollars to repatriate Africans who have chosen to migrate for whatever reasons? Why do we not utilise and deploy those Africans who are available, and who might themselves eventually have to leave because we treat them as we do?

The region has no right to cry wolf while it willingly contributes to the

problem. Also, the revolutionary movements on the African continent have rarely accommodated intellectuals who commit to social issues, and who are visible. We need to wonder why! Highly qualified and experienced professionals, will of necessity, migrate when situations become untenable in the face of a brighter future elsewhere.

It is both weird and bizarre to consider new plans to stem the brain drain by investing monies sorely needed for social priorities, when we have cadres of highly qualified and experienced people who are readily available.

I suspect that the new "liberation struggle" will be the one defined by the processes of introspection undertaken by our new generation of leaders who are developing a better grasp of where we are in the bigger picture, affirmative action notwithstanding!

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NANGOF, the national gathering and reflection by Southern African Domestic Workers, a three-day event, with other voluntary sector

As organisers of the event, they hope that the discussion will lead to becoming more active agents in the region with the realization of their dreams and hands and those of