

On Acquired Expatriate Dependency Syndrome

THE letter of M Makumbi that appeared in your esteemed newspaper of March 18th, 2003 should not go without comment.

I am an expatriate who has been in this country for the past three years, and sometimes I get very frustrated at the country's failure to invest in human capital in fields that matter most. This has been the cause of the so-called Acquired Expatriate Dependency Syndrome (AEDS), described by Makumbi. There seems to be a total ignorance even of what kind of scientists, technologists and engineers this country needs. As a result, more money is being invested in the training of specialists who end up roaming the streets looking for jobs, instead of focusing on training job creators.

One fact though, is that Namibians themselves are not committed to serving in low paying professions, which albeit, require many

years of training and hard work. The University of Namibia, can for example, hardly retain a Namibian with a post-graduate qualification in economics, engineering or IT. They leave the University for better paying jobs outside the University, in the Government and private sector. Similarly, most Namibian medical practitioners find that private practice is better paying than working in a Government hospital.

That is why Namibia must be very thankful for countries like Cuba which continue to send their doctors to work here, and for those other expatriates, who leave their countries to work here. As a matter of fact, Namibia is not the most attractive place for expatriates to work. Salaries are generally low, taxation is very high, and even despite paying all taxes, expatriates have no easy access to state benefits such as basic education and medical care. Notably, many of them are leaving

Namibia for their home countries or to greener pastures elsewhere.

My suggestion is that Namibia should invest heavily in higher education in relevant fields such as medicine and engineering.

The present level of Science and Technology programmes at the University and the Polytechnic should be elevated and each institution should focus on its state-given mandate, and develop human capital in areas relevant to the country's development strategy at their mandated levels.

After thirteen years of independence, Namibia does not have a medical faculty nor an engineering faculty at its university.

For three years I have been at Unam, I have seen zero investment from Government in the engineering training. Even the Polytechnic, with its recently established engineering school, lacks essential infrastructure and human resources to produce competent

technicians, let alone technologists. Now they want to become a university! There is unnecessary and unwarranted competition between Unam and Polytechnic which must be stopped at all costs.

I wish the Namibian people success in this more difficult phase of socio-economic liberation. The prescription for AEDS is investment in science and technology, and empowering higher institutions to hire the best brains from anywhere in the world, so that more Namibians can be trained locally.

That is what even highly developed countries like the USA are doing. Replacing expatriates with ill-trained, inexperienced Namibians for the sake of patriotism, is killing this nation directly. By failing to prepare, you will prepare to fail.

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