

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

From 'brain drain' to 'brain gain': Up migration to make the world richer

There is a way to make the poor of this world \$500 billion better off, but this solution is rarely discussed. This matters, because the international community is gearing up to produce the next set of development goals for 2015-2030, to follow on from the Millennium Development Goals. Some \$2.5 trillion in development aid plus unknown trillions from national budgets hang in the balance, so getting our priorities right is vital. Spending money on poor targets is possibly a wasted opportunity to do much more good elsewhere.

To do the most good, the Copenhagen Consensus has asked 63 teams of the world's top economists to look at the economic, social and environmental costs and benefits of all the top targets. One of these is the transfer of technology from rich to poor and middle-income countries as an aid to sustainable development.

The reason technology is so important is that it makes people more productive, so boosting overall economic growth. Not just that but, once knowledge has been gained, it is embedded in society and can be used as a stepping stone for future growth. Countries with a reasonable technical or research and development base are in a better position to absorb and make the best use of more new technologies as they become available.

Prof Keith E. Maskus from the University of Colorado has written an extensive paper on what works and how much good it will do. As he rightly points out, the UN's technology-related targets are simply too general and bland. Instead, using the economic literature, he puts forward two proposals.

The first proposal is straightforward: If our goal is to get more technology available for



the poor, maybe we should simply increase investment in research and development, especially in the developing world.

The point is the benefits from R&D do not just go to the company doing it; there are also broader societal benefits as productivity gains occur elsewhere in the economy and other people learn on the job or see the possibility for more innovation. After Apple produced an innovative touchscreen on its first iPhone, the knowledge is now available to lots of products in many different areas.

This broader benefit justifies governments supporting research, either through tax credits or direct government spending on research in public institutions. On average, the developing countries spend just 0.2 per cent of their GDP on R&D and perhaps 0.3 per cent in 2030. If we instead aim at 0.5 per cent of GDP by 2030 and 1.5 per cent for emerging economies, this would naturally increase the direct government costs, but it would also increase the long-run technological innovation and capa-

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Picture: File

COMMENTARY

DR BJØRN LOMBORG

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bilities. For comparison, Kenya already spends about 1 per cent, so it is above the target, even if the average developing country is not.

The models estimate in total that for every dollar spent, we could likely end up doing \$3 worth of good. That is not bad.

However, there is another, and much more effective way to increase technological capabilities in low-income countries. Instead of focusing on innovating more technology to make people more productive, we could focus on getting more people to places where they would be productive.

While allowing the free mobility of goods (free trade) can add several percentage points to global GDP, we have long known

that free mobility of people could add anywhere from 67-147 per cent to global GDP. Allowing free mobility could essentially double the world's income.

This is because people in poor areas are not inherently unproductive but their circumstances mostly make them unproductive. So, if they were to migrate, from say, Kenya to the European Union, they would become much more productive.

Of course, absolutely free mobility would result in a massive relocation from poor to rich countries, which would likely engender huge political issues. But Prof Maskus suggests that we could start off

with a modest goal of increasing current skilled migration by 5-20 per cent with 10-year visas.

An increase in skilled migration could mean about 117,000 more managerial and technical workers, with about half going to the EU, 13,000 to other large economies like Turkey and South Africa, and 50,000 would be crossing borders to work within the African continent. Although other research shows migrants would only become half or less as productive as Europeans and other more productive neighbours, this would still make them much better off. The model shows they would earn \$22 billion more over the next 25 years. Moreover, as they would bring with them new ideas and concepts, they will increase productivity in the EU and elsewhere by \$660 million.

Of course, this will also mean an outflow of skilled workers from poorer countries. Maybe 6,900 people will leave Kenya for 10 years. But they will send back money — about \$410 million in total. And while many worry about a "brain drain," there is actually more evidence for a "brain gain": If there is an opportunity to go abroad and make more money as a doctor or engineer, it will induce more young people to invest in a professional education, meaning more doctors and technicians in the long run. And as these skilled professionals come back after 10 years, they will also bring back new ideas and higher productivity.

In total, the costs, mostly in lost tax revenue, are significantly outweighed by the gains. For every dollar spent, this target could do \$10 to \$48 worth of good. The potential benefits could go as high as \$500 billion. That should make the target of higher labour mobility a strong contender for the world's next set of goals.

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Courageous and controversial scholar, artist and philosopher

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ment and democracy. There are yet to emerge national leaders who will entrench the culture of accountability, inclusion and selfless service to the people. In his last days, Ali Mazrui was searching for national leaders who would steer the economic transformation of Africa, especially within the context of recent discoveries of natural resources. When will the leaders of pan-Africanism with

the fire of Kwame Nkrumah and Patrice Lumumba light up the African continent?

An interesting concept in the speculative discourse of pan-Africanism supported by Prof Mazrui, is Afrabia. This concept, inspired by the blurring of the boundaries between Africa and the Middle East, would seem to suggest that the two regions are in the process of merging. The East African Coast seems to be a continuum of parts of the Middle East, especially Oman.

In fact, the number of families that speak Kiswahili in Oman is quite impressive and my own Kiswahili teacher, the late Hilal Bualy, retired to Oman. So did Mwalimu Tejani, formerly of Kenyatta University College. Whether it is cultural connections or relations of ideology, geography or genealogy, the interaction between Africa and the Middle East is extremely intense.

Moreover, the concept of Afrabia is not too far-fetched when one considers the im-

pact of global terrorism and the spread of Islam as a cultural and political force.

Inclusive politics

Ali Mazrui was totally committed to inclusive politics. Writing on language and governance in *The Power of Babel*, he laments the political dependence on imperial languages. This dependence excludes the majority of citizens from the governance process. Even more comical is the fact that on days of national signif-

icance, citizens are addressed by their leaders, not in the national language, but in a European language. Furthermore, European languages are the official languages of constitutions in Africa, notwithstanding the fact that the majority of the people who face the courts on a daily basis speak African languages. Without a clear understanding of the purpose of leadership, these contradictions will persist.

As we celebrate the life of Prof Ali Mazrui, the contro-

versial and courageous son of Africa, let us take time to critically read his writings. Let us ask the question: What happens to a soul genuinely wanting to come home, but denied the opportunity to do so by an elite frightened by the power of ideas?

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