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Politics



“ It is only through labor and painful effort, by
grim energy and resolute courage, that we
move on to better things..”

— Theodore Roosevelt, 26th US President.



Ghana's labour export initiative: Balancing governance, opportunity and challenges

By Dr Samuel Kofi Darkwa

As Ghana sets its sights on a strategic initiative for labour export, by getting ready to sign Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with various countries, it is essential to recognise both the promising prospects and the inherent challenges this approach presents.

In a rapidly evolving global landscape, where projections indicate that Africa's population could double to 2.4 billion by 2050, Ghana stands at a critical juncture. The government's involvement in this venture not only offers opportunities for foreign exchange revenue but also brings a governance dimension that could enhance the treatment of Ghanaians seeking employment abroad.

The recent announcement by the Minister of State in charge of Special Initiatives, Emmanuel Kwadwo Agyekum, underscores a significant move towards combating high unemployment levels in Ghana. With many Ghanaians facing bleak job prospects at home, the labour export initiative has emerged as a potential lifeline. The government's oversight means that migrant workers may be better protected and receive improved terms of engagement in foreign markets. Additionally, with well-structured negotiation processes, the country can ensure that its citizens are fairly compensated, thereby leading to enhanced foreign remittances that

could fund development projects back home. The government can also enter into tax policies with the host countries to receive taxes of Ghanaians abroad to pursue its development agenda.

Framework

However, it is crucial to approach this initiative with a comprehensive framework that addresses potential downsides. One major concern is the risk of brain drain. As Ghana aims to export skilled workers, there is a possibility that the best and brightest may leave the country for good. This shift could exacerbate the already existing skill shortages in crucial sectors within Ghana, as more talented individuals seek opportunities abroad that they believe offer better prospects. The government must be aware of the delicate balance between promoting employment opportunities overseas and maintaining a robust domestic workforce.

Additionally, the competitive nature of international job markets means that aspiring migrant workers will need to meet specific qualifications and pass examinations, which can be daunting

for many. While this requirement ensures that only the best talent is sent abroad, it raises questions about accessibility and equity. Many potential workers may not have the resources or support needed to prepare for such assessments, inadvertently limiting opportunities for those who could benefit immensely from overseas employment.

Against this backdrop, strategic investments in skills development and vocational training must be a fundamental aspect of the initiative. Collaborating with educational institutions and industry experts would enable the government to create targeted programmes that align with the demands of the global labour and domestic markets.

By equipping our workforce with both technical and soft skills, we can improve their chances of international success and simultaneously address local employment needs. The transformative power of education and training cannot be overstated. Investing in human capital can ultimately yield benefits for Ghana as workers return with valuable experience and insights.

Return

Furthermore, as we contemplate the movement of skilled workers abroad, it is equally important to foster an environment conducive to their eventual return. Returning expatriates can play a critical role in national development, as they bring back knowledge, skills and financial resources that can significantly benefit Ghana. To this end, the government should focus on creating attractive conditions—such as improving infrastructure, education, and healthcare—which can entice skilled Ghanaians to come back after their stints abroad. Establishing reintegration programmes that provide access to start-up capital for entrepreneurial ventures or opportunities for them to engage in skill training for the youth can enable returning

migrants to contribute effectively to the local economy.

It is also vital to address the systemic issues contributing to the emigration of talented individuals. Enhancing governance, political, and economic prospects will create an environment that encourages skilled professionals to consider coming back home. A narrative that celebrates Ghanaians abroad and acknowledges their contributions can foster a sense of belonging, making it easier for them to envision a future in Ghana. Also, creating secure investment opportunities for them will provide incentives for their future return.

Civic responsibility

While the primary goal of the labour export initiative is to generate foreign exchange and alleviate domestic unemployment, a sense of civic responsibility among the workforce must also be cultivated. Instilling a mindset where Ghanaians see their contributions to nation-building as integral to community development will lay a strong foundation for sustainable growth.

In summary, Ghana is poised for a transformative phase through this labour export initiative. By approaching it with a governance mindset, the nation can not only address immediate foreign labour demands but can also enhance the skills of its workforce and create an environment that promotes returning citizens. This initiative is an opportunity for Ghana to emerge as a leader in labour export while ensuring that the risks of brain drain are mitigated through substantial investment in local conditions and skills development. The government has the chance to not only change the narrative of migration but to leverage it as a catalyst for national growth, positioning Ghana favourably in a future where a significant portion of the global population resides in Africa.

The writer is a Political Scientist



• Flashback: Emmanuel Kwadwo Agyekum, Minister of State in charge of Special Initiatives, briefing journalists