

Africa-Western Collaboration Day 2020: Education, Migration, and Development Panel Overview

Western University - November 18, 2020 - The Education, Migration, and Development panel in Western's 2020 Africa-Western Collaboration (AWC) day saw multiple informative presentations addressing diverse themes. This panel was facilitated by Dr. Henri Boyi, who is both a professor in the Department of French Studies and a faculty member at The Africa Institute.

Presentations on the topic of education commenced with Aimée Utuza. Having worked as a health professional in Rwanda and coming to Canada as an international student at Western University, Dr. Utuza recognized the stark sociocultural differences between these countries and saw the need to facilitate cross-cultural exchanges. In her presentation, Utuza discussed how she used her role in health promotion as an opportunity to gain insight on others' academic, cultural, and social backgrounds. Utuza found that acceptance of others and their backgrounds is vital to fostering a positive environment of diversity. Additionally, because diversity provides a strong foundation for global health and innovation, there is a need for institutions to integrate opportunities promoting cultural, racial, sexual, and gender diversity within courses, faculties, and communities as a whole. While Utuza calls on universities to facilitate activities and provide services to promote students' expression of diverse cultures, we are left with one question: what is our individual role in promoting diversity in both universities and the community?

While Utuza covered issues apparent in local educational institutions, other presentations addressed international education policy and its consequences. Seydou Ouattara's research focused on academic performance among students from the Ivory Coast. More than 60% of students from the aforementioned region do not reach the sufficient threshold of reading proficiency after six years of primary schooling; despite this, rates of school admission and student success are progressively improving. Ouattara aimed to investigate this paradox between cognitive performance and academic achievement. Results suggested that the observed dichotomy was a result of failure by multiple actors in the education system. Political, economic, social, and cultural factors as well as societal realities must be considered when suggesting reforms in educational policies and/or conveying expectations.

Wilfried Youmbi presented on the topics of education and international migration, with a focus on theory and evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa. Youmbi's research revealed the positive effect that free basic education played in shaping long term pro-emigration attitudes. Emigration contributes to "brain drain", which is when highly skilled and educated individuals leave their home countries to advance their knowledge, and fail to return to their country of origin due to a lack of opportunity. Brain drain is a strong threat for sub-Saharan African economies, as it deprives the region of human capital. Based on Youmbi's research, he recommended that African institutions address both the content of and demand for education, and that governments create local opportunities for educated Africans to incentivize them to stay in their home countries. Based on the research presented, it is clear that reforms around education are necessary in order to better not only student experience, but also post-graduate opportunities.

Three presentations discussed gender and sociocultural disparities related to migration. Jemima Nomunume Baada explored the gendered dynamics of reproduction among women who had migrated from Upper West Regions of Ghana (UWR) to the Brong-Afaho region (BAR) of Ghana. Using qualitative methods, Baada found that many migrant women who have settled in BAR have many migration-related concerns including limited childcare support, absence of parental figures (lack of communal support in raising children), generational culture loss, and decreased economic resources (particularly land, due to outsider status). These findings demonstrate that there is a need to raise awareness of gender disparities in resource attainment

Contributors: Arin Abraham, Aishwarya Kulkarni, Elizabeth Mebrahtu, and Holly Yeung

Africa-Western Collaboration Day 2020: Education, Migration, and Development Panel Overview

among migrant groups, and to implement initiatives to support these vulnerable populations within BAR.

Elmond Bandauko and Senanu Kutor presented research about informal settlements (IS) in Harare, Zimbabwe. Looking through the lens of territorial stigmatization, Bandauko identified stigma surrounding IS and the concomitant narratives it produced about these places, which contribute to an overall negative image of IS and their residents' vulnerability to forced displacement at the hands of public authorities. His research revealed that residents of IS promoted counternarratives in response to popularized stigma. These counternarratives, obtained through focus group interviews with IS residents, included ideas like IS were "good places for the urban poor" to live and that they were transitional places that provided better lives for their residents despite their precariousness.

Meanwhile, Kutor's research studied residents' perception of social mobility. From a theoretical perspective, two opposing perspectives on IS exist. One perspective deems IS potential springboards for residents to escape poverty whereas another posits that IS are a perpetual poverty trap. Kutor found that most residents agreed with the latter perspective. As IS often lack infrastructure, services, and economical opportunities, many residents feel disconnected from the community at large and feel helpless in improving their current socioeconomic status. In the broader context of African urbanization and the inevitable migration to IS, this research reveals the hardships that migrants face and the challenges in combating territorial stigmatization and social immobility that lead to urban inequity.

On the topic of development, Chinelo Ezenwa delved into the history of 19th century European missionaries in colonial Africa, with specific reference to the impact of missionary schools. Ezenwa's presentation highlighted the consequences of colonialism and how narratives created by missionaries are still prevalent in Africa today. Ezenwa provided evidence of this by first unpacking the term colonialism, which is when an economically advantaged group takes advantage of a less advantaged group. By doing this, colonizers are able to build and maintain a mythical picture of the colonized as weak, lazy, and uncivilized. The development of missionary schools contributed to this rhetoric by estranging Africans from their culture and sense of self. Ezenwa's research explored the concept of colonization, how it impedes global development, and how contemporary aid continues to mimic the efforts of the missionaries.

Modern development, in contrast to colonization, aims to connect with beneficiaries using meaningful partnerships. QingXiao Cui, Rebecca Jackson, and Jade Rozal presented lessons learned from their remote international internship experience working with a Tanzanian organization, Mikono Yetu. Facing issues with finding a meaningful connection to their work, Cui, Jackson, and Rozal found value in educating themselves about the organization's goals and creating cross-cultural relationships with community partners. The insight gathered could contribute to research on the development of relationships in remote internships – a pertinent topic during a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted many jobs to the virtual space.

Overall, the session touched on topics relevant to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4, 10, and 11 – respectively quality education, reduced inequalities, and sustainable cities and communities. However, further research and development based on these topics has the potential to contribute to the achievement of many more SDGs in the future.