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Higher Education Scholarships

A review and summary of findings of nine long-term scholarship programs

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ABSTRACT: USAID has had a long history of providing higher education scholarships for participants in developing countries, particularly where the capacity of a country's existing higher education system is weak. To better understand the impact of higher education scholarships, this paper derives primarily from a review of USAID evaluations of their long-term scholarship programs (for study in-country, in the U.S., or in a third country for an academic degree—i.e., a bachelor's, master's, or Ph.D—for at least one year of study) for participants from countries including Bangladesh, Benin, Chad, the Dominican Republic, Nepal, Poland, Senegal, Somalia, and Tanzania. Based on a review of these evaluations and general trends among them, this paper discusses the challenges and limitations to measuring impact, the perceived impact of higher education scholarships at the individual, institutional, and the community/national level, and predominant issues among scholarship programs.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

USAID has had a long history of providing higher education scholarships for participants in developing countries, particularly where the capacity of a country's existing higher education system is weak. These scholarship programs, for study in-country, in the U.S., or in a third country, are often developed with one of three types of objectives in mind (with potential for overlap among them):

- Development—to build capacity in the partner country
- Academic—to enhance institutions in the donor country and also provide opportunities for mutually beneficial future collaboration with institutions in partner countries
- Diplomatic—to promote influence of the donor country

While studies on the returns on investment to higher education do exist, there has been limited evaluation of the impact of higher education scholarship programs on participants' home countries once they complete their studies. In terms of impact evaluations of scholarship programs that are available, the overall trend among USAID-funded and other donor-funded scholarship programs is to conduct follow-up evaluations of scholarship programs after the scholarship program period is completed. These post-evaluations are generally based on the responses of participants—their reactions to the training they received and their perceptions of how the training made an impact within their country as a result of their increased skills and knowledge. Without more substantial research on the impact of higher education scholarships, as the evaluation of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) Fellowship Programme describes, "Despite the positive accounts of alumni and employers about the effects of training on individuals and organisations, there is little formal evidence of the impact of training programmes on poverty alleviation, improvements in sectors, the economy or society."[1] However, in a globally tightened budgetary climate, it becomes even more important to understand the impact of higher education scholarships, especially given the high costs of funding the long-term study of a participant.

This paper derives primarily from a review of USAID evaluations of their long-term scholarship programs (for study in-country, in the U.S., or in a third country for an academic degree—i.e., a bachelor's, master's, or Ph.D—for at least one year of study) for participants from countries including Bangladesh, Benin, Chad, the Dominican Republic, Nepal, Poland, Senegal, Somalia, and Tanzania. Most of the USAID evaluations reviewed for this paper date from the late 1980s through the 1990s, which may reflect either a lower frequency with which the evaluations have been carried out more recently, a decrease in the number of scholarship programs, and/or a lag between when an impact evaluation is conducted and is available through USAID's Development Experience Clearinghouse and other online databases. This paper also draws from a few non-USAID donor evaluations of scholarship programs, including Norad and the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission (CSC) in the United Kingdom. Based on a review of these evaluations and general trends among them, this paper discusses the challenges and limitations to measuring impact, the perceived impact of higher education scholarships at the individual, institutional, and the community/national level, and predominant issues among scholarship programs. Due to the nature of the evaluations, much of this review consists of anecdotal

information from the responses evaluators received, and because of a lack of more substantial research on the returns on investment to higher education scholarships in developing countries, this paper does not contain a review of peer-reviewed or grey literature.

Challenges and limitations to measuring impact

Lack of M&E and baseline data. One of the overall findings across the evaluations is that there is a lack of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems developed prior to the implementation of a scholarship program. The absence of M&E systems may be explained in part by what the CSC regards as the difficulty of identifying indicators to quantify, particularly in certain sectors where benefits may not be easily measurable.[2] This in turn impedes the ability to demonstrate impact and the effectiveness of scholarships. For example, the Norad Fellowship Programme lacked clearly identified objectives and indicators for measuring results.[3] Evaluation of the long-term impact of scholarship programs is therefore usually limited to reports on numbers of awards and successful graduates[4] and whether or not funds were expended. [5]

With a general absence of M&E systems, impact assessments conducted by development agencies typically lack three critical elements in determining whether skills were acquired: a) baseline data upon which a participant's skill change can be measured b) control groups of peers to use for comparison, and c) follow-up surveys of supervisors to examine increases in skills and knowledge. [6] Similarly, as described in the USAD/Chad training evaluation, baseline data on the participants—such as information on salary level and position held, job description, productivity at the workplace (measured by employer's job performance appraisal, if any) and family size—were not available for the evaluation.[7] If this baseline data had been established prior to participants' departure for training, the evaluation team could have made a pre- and post-training comparison to then hypothesize on the links between a participant's situation before and after training, comparisons that were absent in all of the scholarship program evaluations reviewed. Given these constraints, according to the USAID/Nepal training evaluation, it was not possible to establish a causal relationship between investment in human resource development and the vast economic and social changes taking place on the Nepalese landscape.[8]

Methodology. Lacking baseline data and control groups of peers for comparison, the impact evaluations were based on "tracer" studies (funded by the respective donor)—that is, follow-up primarily with returned participants and sometimes their employers and other stakeholders. These studies often consisted of surveys/questionnaires, individual interviews, group interviews, and/or focus groups to gather information.

The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), however, suggests that tracer studies are not an effective means to assess post-award impact since they are conducted irregularly and follow-up is difficult.[9] In addition, sufficient resources are needed in order to trace and/or maintain contact with former participants, as well as to undertake data collection and analysis; evaluation work can also be time-consuming for both funders and alumni, which can sometimes deter the latter from participating.[10] Another limitation of tracer studies is explained in the USAID/Chad training evaluation: if the participants returned to the organizations where they had been employed, evaluators pronounced the project "successful" and presumed that skills acquired during training would positively affect the institution[11] with little exploration of other potential impacts and implications.

Other challenges associated with this method of evaluation include being able to find sufficient alumni and securing a representative cross-section of individuals to report on.[12] This also leads to another potential problem because those who do respond to surveys or are willing to participate in interviews/focus groups may do so because they were more satisfied with their scholarship program, thereby potentially contributing to a positive bias in the results. Moreover, because high profile alumni are easier to locate, their responses can bias the results further.[13]

Even after being able to locate alumni who were willing to participate in impact studies, they often resulted in small sample sizes.[i] For example, in the USAID/Benin training evaluation, the sample consisted of only 32 participants.[14] In the USAID/Senegal evaluation, the target population was approximately 1,200 former participants since 1961, but evaluators were only able to interview 100 participants, only 18 of whom were female.[15] Furthermore, because of time constraints, interviews were limited to only participants in the cities of Dakar, Kaolack, and Bambey, and the survey was weighted towards more recent years, further increasing the possibility of biases in the results.[16] The USAID evaluation of its East Central Europe Scholarship Program (ECESP), which provided scholarships to students from Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and the Slovak Republic, also only included interviews with participants from Poland.[17]

Attribution of impact. The CSC program evaluations discussed the difficulty of attributing the impact of a scholarship since it is impossible to determine what might have happened without the scholarship.[18,19] Assessing the specific contributions of an award to any outcome or activity can be even more challenging or inaccurate, particularly when some time has elapsed since completion, or when an evaluation takes places too soon after a participant completes his/her program for there to be a fully observed impact.[20] Moreover, the perceived impact of the scholarship at the time of an evaluation may not endure later, but subsequent evaluations to measure whether or not participants have remained employed, have been promoted, and so on, are usually not carried out.[21] For example, at the time of the ECESP evaluation, only one of the first of three anticipated questionnaires was distributed, so it was not able to capture the longer term impacts of the program.[22] It is unknown whether the rest of the questionnaires were ever distributed and if another evaluation took place.

Similarly, as described above, baseline data on participants are generally not gathered before they begin their studies, leading to a lack of quantitative data. As a result, impacts of scholarship programs are often described through case studies instead, which may attribute positive impacts to the scholarship program without measureable evidence. For example, the Norad Fellowship Program evaluation featured a case study of Tanzania in which the development of the country's supply and distribution of electric power is attributed to the scholarship program: "…the NTNU [Norwegian University of Science and Technology] hydropower course has produced 40 Diploma and master's degree holders from Tanzania over a period of about 15 years, which has clearly been critical to the development of the country's supply and distribution of electric power."[23] However, the evaluation did not mention the scale of improvement nor the other interacting forces that may have contributed to the country's electricity infrastructure.

[i] Throughout this paper, please note that percentages used to describe how participants responded in the impact evaluations reflect the percentage of *respondents* to surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups, not the percentage of total participants in a particular scholarship program. Any other descriptions of what participants reported should be understood as the views of the *respondents,* not the entire population of participants of a particular scholarship program, unless otherwise noted.

Impact of donor-funded higher education scholarships

This section discusses the impact of donor-funded higher education scholarships, which is often assessed at three different levels: individual, institutional, and at the broader community/society/national level. As described previously, the findings discussed here are primarily based on surveys/questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups with participants.

Individual

The perceived impact of higher education scholarships at the individual level is for the most part based on participants' personal satisfaction with their studies, changes in their attitudes about the future, and their personal career advancement.

Personal satisfaction and development of new perspectives. Overall, participants expressed satisfaction with their training. For example, according to the 2009 CSC evaluation,[24] for participants in the years 2002 to 2007, 88% to 92% of participants rated academic facilities during their studies as "excellent" or "good" while 81% to 88% felt the same way about standards of supervision and teaching. Participants from Nepal also expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their institutes and universities (91% of those trained in the United States and 86% of those trained in India were totally satisfied), but the levels of satisfaction were so uniformly high that the evaluation noted that it was not able to determine which types of institutions were particularly effective.[25]

After their training, participants also tended to express a change in their attitudes and greater optimism about the future. For example, Cooperative Association of States for Scholarships (CASS) participants reported that their training gave them an optimistic attitude about their chances for improved opportunities in the future,[26] and 75% of the Benin training participants expressed their expectation to occupy a top-level management position within the next five years.[27] Both male and female respondents of the Nepal training evaluation also reported that they gained self-confidence, a broader outlook on life, learned new ways of dealing with people, a deeper scientific outlook, and greater inquisitiveness.[28]

Furthermore, as with most of the evaluations, the evaluation of the Andean Peace Scholarship Program (APSP) revealed that participants learned and developed a greater appreciation for U.S. culture, while also gaining a new perspective of their own culture. Formal and informal opportunities to meet U.S. citizens were critical to increasing their ability to expand their world view, and to motivate and equip them to be agents of change when they returned home.[29]

Acquisition of skills and leadership. Most participants reported that they gained knowledge in their area of expertise and access to equipment and expertise not available at home. For example, over 99% of respondents in the CSC evaluation reported that they gained knowledge in their field of expertise,[30] and employment rates among returned participants were correspondingly high—100% of the Benin training program participants found employment at the time the evaluation was conducted,[31] and over 75% of the participants in the CSC evaluation reported finding work within a year of completing their award.[32] The Nepal evaluation indicated that the training had an especially strong impact on participants' careers because degrees provided them with the basic qualifications for career advancement, training in the U.S. in particular carried immense prestige, and because participants were trained in unique skills in short supply in Nepal.[33] In the CASS evaluation, because the participants were native Spanish

speakers, acquiring English skills supported and enhanced their ability to apply their training.[34] Between 85 and 90% of CASS participants also reported that training improved their overall leadership capacity, and that they have drawn on their leadership skills and motivations to take on community and grass roots leadership activities.[35]

Promotion/career advancement. Another individual impact of training/higher education scholarships that participants reported was career advancement. Many participants who received a CSC scholarship, for example, reported obtaining a more senior post one year after award, and many said that it helped them advance.[36] Half of all the respondents from the Chad evaluation reported receiving a promotion after returning from training, 83% of whom attributed the promotion to training,[37] and participants from the Benin training program changed jobs since their training, three-quarters of whom said their current job was better than their previous position.[38] Participants from Nepal benefited greatly from their training since the majority were new entrants to the labor market and many of them did not have any previous work experience in their sponsoring organizations; they felt that their training abroad profoundly affected their careers, allowing them to pursue careers in government agencies. According to the Nepal evaluation, the training "had a profound and generally positive impact on the careers of the vast majority of the trainees," as most eventually moved to middle and senior levels of government agencies and public sector corporations.[39]

In some of the evaluations, salaries of returned participants were likewise reported to have increased. For example, based on the USAID/Dominican Republic evaluation, participants on average enjoyed real salary increases of 40 to 50% upon return,[40] and 93% of participants in the CASS program also reported increased income.[41] However, women in the Dominican Republic made an average of RD$700 a month less than men after controlling for factors such as number of years working, post, field of specialization and degree,[42] and the Nepal evaluation also noted that men and women differed greatly in terms of their perceptions about the impact of participant training programs on their respective careers. Whereas the vast majority of men from Nepal rated the impact of the participant training program as "great," the ratings given by women participants were much more evenly divided between "great" and "moderate."[43] And while a promotion is often cited as a hypothetical indicator of training impact, the Senegal evaluation remarked that in the African context, many other factors related to family, religion, or ethnic groups could also be reasons behind a promotion. Without a control group to which rates of promotion can be compared, it is difficult to fully attribute a promotion to the training a participant received through a scholarship.

Institutional

Institutional impact is expected to occur after individual participants return to institutions at which they previously worked, or enter new institutions, and apply the skills and knowledge they gained through their training to effect greater change at their institution. This might occur through participants' application of new practices or introducing innovations, and sharing their ideas with their colleagues and employers so that they can ripple throughout the institution and thereby create a wider impact.

Applying new skills and introducing new practices. Most participants felt they were able to use specific skills and knowledge gained during their studies in their work. For example, 87% of respondents in the Chad evaluation reported that their performance improved because of their training, and that they used their training very often,[44] and almost 69% of the Benin participants

reported that they have been able to apply "a lot" or "a great deal" of what they learned to current jobs.[45] Participants reported that they significantly increased their analytical and technical skills, and learned techniques for managing people and projects,[46] and participants similarly felt positive regarding whether or not they felt like leaders or identified skills in themselves associated with leadership.[47]

As a result of their new skills and knowledge, most participants felt that their award enabled them to make changes and influence their work. Overall, participants commonly reported that they were able to introduce new practices into their organization after their training. However, the ability to introduce new practices can vary based on the sector. For example, as described in the CSC evaluation, those who studied health, education, or agriculture were the most likely to report significant ability to introduce new practices. Female participants were almost as likely to report the ability to introduce new practices as men, 89% and 90% respectively, but at lower levels, with more (38% of women) responding 'to some extent' than 'significantly' (49% of men).[48] Along the same lines, women reported significantly less impact on their institutions than men in the Senegal training evaluation.[49]

In addition to participants themselves, their supervisors were sometimes surveyed to collect their impressions of the impact of their employees' training/scholarships. For the most part, supervisors of returned participants gave indirect evidence of their satisfaction with training programs as well. In the Benin training evaluation, supervisors generally agreed that returned participants shared their knowledge and skills in the organization, had done something personally to improve the organization, took initiative, and had increased their responsibilities and salaries because of their U.S. training program.[50]

Despite these kinds of responses from supervisors, some participants explained that they did not feel they had the authority to put their training into practice—20% of the participants surveyed in the Benin training evaluation said they did not have the support of their supervisors to apply their new skills, and others said their current work did not require them to apply what they had learned. The Benin evaluation also noted that it was particularly hard for participants to apply their learning in the public sector, where there is less flexibility for new ideas and practices.[51] Furthermore, as indicated in the Nepal training evaluation, the degree of utilization of skills also depended on the institutional capabilities of the organizations in which participants worked. In Nepal, well-known barriers include lack of incentives and bureaucratic systems, inadequate support from supervisors, inappropriate assignments, poor support services, and an unfavorable political climate. In countries like Nepal, it is also common for officials to occupy senior level positions without the appropriate technical qualifications, and to feel threatened by better-qualified junior staff trained through one of the scholarship programs—consequently, they are even less inclined to involve former training participants in the decision-making process.[52]

Sharing skills and knowledge with colleagues. Whether or not trained participants return to their home countries and share their new skills and knowledge with their colleagues and other people around them is typically regarded as an indication that the training participants received has produced a greater impact—if a participant shares his/her new skills, the institution benefits from this and creates a "multiplier effect" of USAID or other donor-funded training. For example, 84% of respondents in the Chad evaluation reported that they shared their new skills with their colleagues,[53] and the APSP evaluation noted that participants' leadership skills were

significantly enhanced, moving them quickly into high visibility positions where they could share their newly acquired knowledge with others, thereby contributing to the multiplier effect.[54] In the same vein, the evaluation of the CASS program centered on the assumption that participants can act as change agents in their societies to improve the general quality of their own lives and of those around them, thereby creating sustainable impact and development or wider-ranging impacts at the regional and national levels—"this impact is expected to continue and multiply as returnees mature in their professions."[55] Despite these positive accounts, it was not clear from the evaluations whether or not information was shared on a formal and regular basis, and if this knowledge was shared more pervasively.

Gains in efficiency, productivity, or profitability. The majority of respondents, many of whom returned to their previous employer indicated and provided examples of improvements at their institutions, although there was significant divergence in responses according to the sector and training type. For example, in the Senegal training evaluation, nearly half of participants from the health sector reported that there were no positive effects on their institutions from the training, compared to only 7% of participants in agriculture. Health professionals in Senegal complained they were not placed in positions that reflected their increased skill level[56] (in contrast to the finding described above in the CSC evaluation that training in the health sector allowed participants to more easily introduce new practices to their workplace). Government officials in Chad also believed significant improvements in management of key development ministries (health, agriculture, and planning) were due to USAID-sponsored management training programs in the U.S. and in Chad, [57] though how these improvements were measured was not described.

The Nepal training evaluation provided some specific examples of how training prepared participants to contribute to the growth and functioning of organizations. One example described how former participants have continuously headed the Institute of Education, the only agency in Nepal exclusively responsible for producing cadres of trained teachers for schools at all levels, as well as for offering higher level courses in different subspecialties of education. Participants were reported to have diffused new skills and ideas throughout the organization, facilitating linkages with other institutions, and demonstrating leadership potential in both research and administration. The participants' contributions also improved the organization's confidence to develop new plans and programs in response to the changing needs of Nepal's development, and to reduce dependence on external support.[58]

Community/society

This section discusses the potential impacts of higher education scholarships at the greater community or national level, though as many of the evaluations described, this is the hardest level at which to measure impact.

Establishment of new institutions. As discussed above, most participants believed they were able to make an impact on their institutions by applying their skills and knowledge, and introducing new practices. Some participants also went on to establish their own organizations, which many of the evaluations considered to be a sign of impact. For example, in the Benin training evaluation, 41% of the respondents had started a private business or NGO in the country. This required them to hire assistants, secretaries, and other employees, and to rent or buy office equipment and space, which led the participants to believe they were making a greater impact

on the community because they had created jobs.[59] In Chad, returned participants formed an organization to promote modern management.[60]

Participation in the community. Based on the Benin training evaluation, the impact on the community after participants completed their studies was negligible. Participants did not really change the level or nature of their involvement in community affairs, and figures actually indicated a slight drop in involvement, from 78% involved before training to 75% after training. This drop in participation may have been a result of participants returning to or obtaining more demanding jobs that precluded them from spending more time in community affairs. Moreover, only 30% said they could put their U.S. education to use in community programs a little, 38% said some, and 17% said a lot.[61] On the other hand, the CASS evaluation provided an example of how women participants assumed leadership within the community to help form voluntary groups to work on community projects, one of which led to the establishment of a day-care center.[62] It also discussed how participants organized youth and women's programs that had not previously existed, for an overall increase in community activity by the participants.

Development impact. According to the Benin training evaluation, it is difficult to assess the impact of scholarship programs at the national level or on sustainable development since it is too complex and long-term to evaluate.[63] However, the impact evaluations reviewed for this paper suggest some impact that the scholarship programs have made—for example, in the CSC evaluation, 90% of the respondents reported activity in at least one of its twelve key priority areas (health, agricultural/rural productivity, education, governance, international relations, poverty reduction, social inequalities and human rights, physical infrastructure, environmental protection, conflict resolution/humanitarian assistance, scientific and research applications, and job creation) for development and leadership, and 45% of respondents reported having influence on government thinking, 48% having a socioeconomic impact, and 81% being involved in a specific project in at least one of the priority areas.[64] The APSP evaluation similarly noted that participants were "influencing business and government policy and programs at a higher level than before" (p. 10).[65]

Furthermore, 25% of respondents in the Benin evaluation reported working in NGOs in areas such as youth entrepreneurship, health, human resources, and the environment, and organizations that focus on diplomatic issues defending human rights, helping micro-entrepreneurs get loans, teaching, and research. One participant wrote a textbook being used to teach others, and another translated an English text, helping shift pedagogical approaches in the country. The Benin evaluation also indicated that about 60% of participants were working in government, leading to subtle changes—according to participants and key informants, U.S.-trained government workers solved problems more directly, took on difficult tasks, exposed themselves to risk more readily, were involved in corruption less frequently, and managed their own time and resources more efficiently. However, the evaluation mentioned its limitations since impacts could not be easily measured, particularly for an assessment that took place over only 30 days.[66]

Depending on the pool of skills already in-country, higher education scholarships can make a greater relative impact by contributing to a more technically-skilled workforce in key sectors of the economy. For example, the Nepal evaluation described a severe shortage of trained personnel in key sectors but that the training participants received contributed to tremendous growth in the numbers of technical staff in the country once they returned. As a result, the

evaluation reported that many major development initiatives in agriculture, health education, rural development, and family planning were implemented that would have otherwise been impossible.[67]

At the same time, while participants can bring back valuable skills to their country, as described in the Norad scholarship evaluation, the potential impact of a scholarship largely depends on the kind of environment participants return to in their home country. For example, the impact that participants from Bangladesh could make when they returned home was much more limited because age and seniority largely influence the ability to rise through the ranks and to be in a position to make decisions. Therefore, participants found it more appealing to leave the country and find jobs elsewhere where they could better apply the skills they had acquired. On the other hand, because Tanzania is a relatively classless society, Tanzanian participants encountered less hierarchy when they returned home; they were also able to better use their skills in growing industries such as oil and petroleum, and the environment.[68]

Issues among higher education scholarship programs

Despite the generally positive responses from participants regarding the impact of scholarship programs, there were several issues revealed through these evaluations that may suggest areas for improvement or greater consideration when implementing scholarship programs.

Appropriateness of training institutions. Although many participants were satisfied with their training institutions, some participants were frustrated with their placements. In the Nepal training evaluation, participants reported that the educational curriculum was not appropriate to the conditions of Nepal.[69] Many participants stressed that their courses were geared more to the requirements of industrialized rather than of developing societies, and that the instructors assumed the ready availability of resources, technologies, and an institutional framework that simply do not exist in Nepal. To make training more applicable and to avoid the problem of brain drain mentioned above, the Somalia training evaluation suggested that academic training be conducted in-country or in a third-country.[70]

Finding suitable employment. While most participants found employment within a year of returning to their home countries, many participants had trouble finding a suitable position that matched the skills they had acquired. In the Nepal training evaluation, one common problem that was cited was that sponsoring ministries or agencies had usually not planned how and in what roles they would place the participants once they completed their studies.[71] Furthermore, public bureaucracies in places like Nepal tend not to provide the kinds of incentives that would encourage participants to maximally utilize their skills. On the other hand, in the Chad training evaluation, 83% of respondents felt that their former employer prepared their reintegration into the office (although it should be noted that this was only based on 6 respondents).[72]

Brain drain or non-returnees. As the CSC evaluation describes, the outcomes of scholarship programs are generally dependent on the individual participants, implying that issues such as brain drain and the availability of employment and resources at participants' home countries can affect the potential for positive impact.[73] In the Benin training evaluation, it was found that about 12% of participants did not return to their home countries; most participants felt this was an issue because they considered funding of non-returnees' scholarships a waste of U.S. and

Beninese resources, and that it was also morally wrong to accept a scholarship and not return after agreeing to.[74] An evaluation of the USAID participant training program in Somalia painted an even more dismal picture—the return rates ranged from only 31% to 83%. Based on the evaluation's analysis of how much was spent on the participants—$2.1 million—the evaluation concluded that USAID was spending money to produce what could be a net brain drain rather than a brain gain to the country.[75] In addition, according to the ECESP evaluation, which was comprised of a rural managers program, a teacher program, and a senior manager/public administrator program, greater risk of non-completion and non-return, and lower likelihood of being employed was associated with the rural manager program.[76] In contrast, the CSC evaluation painted a more optimistic picture—it reported that 94% of the respondents were working or living in their home countries, at least at the time the evaluation took place.[77]

Lack of follow-up. Overall, the evaluations mentioned inadequate follow-up as one of the major problems of the scholarship programs. There was a relative absence of follow-up activities and fostering of connections after participants completed their studies, thereby missing an important opportunity to maintain the investment already made in the participants.[78] The Nepal training evaluation suggested that follow-up activities, similar in concept to current U.S. educational perspectives about lifelong learning, be an essential aspect of the training programs since efforts to encourage interaction between the participants and their former teachers or fellow participants seemed to be insufficient. Many of the evaluations specifically mentioned participants' desire to have a more operational alumni association to help with follow-up among participants and to help maintain or create linkages; as the APSP evaluation described, one of the root barriers to the establishment of a more operational alumni association may have been the absence of a strong set of common objectives on which to base.[79]

Some participants also felt that had they not received the training that they did, they could have advanced to more promising careers. In the Nepal training evaluation, respondents indicated that because the government had selected the field of training for them, they were bound by the government's selection and obligation to work for them for several years after completing their studies. As a result, they felt they were not able to choose a different career path that could have provided more rewards—such as in engineering, medicine, management, or information technology.[80]

Gender considerations. While many of the scholarship programs sought to provide equal opportunities to women, the Chad training evaluation mentioned the failure to promote significant change in the government concerning the recruitment and selection of women for training.[81] According to the evaluation, this is a challenge that should be confronted head on since the problem is deeply embedded in Chadian society—there is a lack of interest from the highest levels in making real progress to promote women in the public sector, few policies or procedures designed to effect change, and a history of predominately hiring men during periods when the government was growing.

Cost-effectiveness. The evaluations reviewed for this paper typically did not explore the issue of cost-effectiveness, perhaps because objectives and anticipated outcomes of training were not always clearly specified.[82] However, the ECESP evaluation did assess program performance and then determined whether the costs were reasonable in the context of project design and performance: "Overall, the ECESP Program has been adequately implemented and has achieved a reasonable level of outputs and impact at reasonable program cost…"[83] Nonetheless, almost

20% of participants did not return to their home country after going through the English and training programs at the expense of the project, resulting in incurred costs that could not be recouped after their termination.

Conclusion

As this paper demonstrates, the impacts of higher education scholarships are generally categorized based on whether they occur at the individual, institutional, and community/society/national level. For the most part, these evaluations rely solely on the responses of former participants and their employers, with occasional input solicited from other stakeholders as well. As many of the evaluations themselves noted, because the scholarship programs usually have insufficient or no M&E systems in place before a scholarship program is implemented, improving M&E frameworks may be imperative to widen the range of data gathering options and to better examine the impact of scholarships, particularly in light of the objectives that the scholarship programs are trying to achieve.

A review of these impact evaluations also reveals that the results or impacts can vary greatly depending on the technical sector, which may in turn require a greater analysis of where the impact can be maximized and risks can be minimized—that is, what subjects should participants study so that their skills will be valuable to their home countries, and at the same time, what sectors/institutions will provide participants with the incentives to remain in their country, particularly when brain drain can potentially undercut the investment made in the participants? Should only certain countries that demonstrate more impact be eligible to receive scholarships? If there is greater flexibility to utilize skills in the private sector than in the public sector, what steps can be taken before a scholarship program is implemented to better ensure impact at the broader institutional and national level? Additionally, as discussed in this paper, most women reported that they were able to make less of an impact on their institutions than men were. In some instances, they were also compensated less than men, potentially creating less personal incentive and fewer opportunities in the workplace for women to maximize their skills. This leads to the question of what else, besides providing equal opportunities for women, needs to be done in order for scholarships for women to produce greater impact?

In all, while there are some general trends among participants surveyed or interviewed—many feel they benefited from their scholarships and are able to make some sort of impact either at their institution or in their community/society—it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from these studies alone. These evaluations were completed only once after a scholarship program period was completed, leaving much of the information gathered at the time now out of date. The pertinence of up-to-date evaluations is even greater since the dynamics and political situation in countries can change drastically after a scholarship program is implemented (e.g., Somalia), subsequently affecting the impact of the scholarship program. Furthermore, because the evaluations were based primarily on subjective input, whether or not scholarships provided to participants from a particular country made a broader impact on the country is mostly speculative and anecdotal. To gain a better sense of the impact of higher education scholarships to the partner country, many more resources and preparation are needed to develop and sustain an approach to evaluating impact that accounts for the innumerable variables that can influence the impact of these kinds of programs.

Endnotes

[1] Norad. (2005). *Evaluation of the Norad Fellowship Programme,* p. 47. http://www.norad.no/en/tools-and-publications/publications/evaluations/publication/_attachment/106315?_download=true&_ts=11eb6356fdd

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