



**Migration Symposium 9 & 10 May 2019 on Curaçao**  
Migration and Socioeconomic Development  
Policy challenges and options

**Break Out Session 3: Brain drain brain gain: a matter of reversing the coin?**

Brain drain and brain gain are characteristics of the same economy. What are disadvantages and advantages of a brain-drain? Measures to prevent brain-drain / bring back diaspora and/or profit from diaspora? One of the factors concern moderate socioeconomic perspectives in the ACS-countries versus positive socioeconomic perspectives elsewhere. This means that push and pull factors work simultaneously, causing net negative migration and a (risk of) decreasing population and in particular (the risk of) a decreasing labor population. At the same time relative welfare levels, especially in the region, make that the ACS islands attract labor migration from the region. What are the advantages and disadvantages? What are means and ways to address this situation? Could for example the management of inter-island labor migration be a viable response: what is the rationale? What other measures are needed?

**Moderator:** ir. Damien Richardson (SER Sint Maarten)

**Notetaker:** Bethannia Peinado (student University of Curaçao)

**Introductions by:**

**Prof. Dr. Antonio Carmona Báez** President of the University of Sint Maarten

**Anni Corridor** Architect (Venezuelan migrant living in Curaçao)

**Description**

The Brain Drain Brain Gain Breakout session was hosted at the Avila Beach Hotel, as part of the Migration Symposium 2019 to discuss the different perspectives of the attendees on developing policies to manage diaspora within our region. Mr. Richardson guided the discussion in the first part of the session with questions aimed to expose the concerns, benefits, possible opportunities and



personal experiences regarding brain gain, brain gain. This discussion generated highlights that were used in the second part to develop three stepping stones to sustainable policies that will help making the come and go of brain drain/brain gain, waves of hope from which we can leverage.

## Part 1: Questions and Perspectives

**Question 1:** “What is your first thought of brain drain, brain gain, condensed in one word?”

Diaspora, Lost (opportunity), Defining, Concern, Challenging, Jobs, Economy, Balance, Decisive, Threat, Opportunity.

There are many aspects to the problem. Expressing how we feel can help us define true concerns as a region having for so long been in the situation where the young have to move to another region to study or to continue their career.

**Question 2:** “What are the benefits?”

When thinking of Brain drain, benefits are difficult to mention, because we don't plan it. We can't assure that the diaspora will come back. And regardless of there being opportunity of gaining network and knowledge gathering to Brain Gain, in the Caribbean region there is 45 million of people from which twenty million in diaspora and they all have a voice and a weight to the problem.

Using the experience gained when going abroad is usable to the country when they come back; there has to be a concrete plan on how to attain that experience.

The island of Curacao has been suffering the results of brain drain of two decades but that gap is now little by little being filled by the knowledge of people from abroad that come here to live and work.

While it's true that we (on Curacao) haven't collapsed there is no palpable improvement either. One of every ten students came back with a diploma but the country was not prepared to maintain these educated citizens; there needs to be better policies to attract the educated people that studied abroad and we haven't done that.

To build a nation it is important to have continuous training and knowledge sharing in mind for the policy making. Besides, we are letting the students go abroad to study programs that are not applicable here so the problem is getting deeper.

**Question 3:** “How do we deal with the reality of the Caribbean where people break (*break the connection with their country of origin*)?”

Most of us studied and lived abroad before returning to our country of origin and we do see the benefits and the value we add to our country and our region. We come back because we feel we can

help our islands and feel part of a fulfilled nation. But often we don't think of the benefits as a regional asset. We have to foster that feeling, not thinking of ourselves as a small island with limitations but as a great region with opportunities.

The truth is that kids now most of the time don't think of the region they think only of an island and do not know the interaction of their own region. Meanwhile Croatia has an investment program where they aim to attract the people that left and reconnect with their Country.

While talking on the phone with one of my best friends that lives in Holland at one point I said to him: "If anything happens to your mom, I will be the first to know". His mother lives right next to me, while he has been living in Holland voor over twenty-five years. If family is not a reason strong enough for someone to comeback I feel that maybe thinking that the country or region will be enough to bring them back is not right. The threshold is too high; we should instead invest in attracting others that are looking for a Caribbean living. The life experience is what we can compete with against bigger countries, what will attract the new brains.

People migrate for many reasons, the potential of self-realization and family is part but not all to bring someone back; it can be opportunity appeal, economic appeal.

If we can make effort to let our kids to go abroad to study, we can make the effort to bring our kids back with a policy that will make attractive to come back.

There is a translation to manipulate what is the tangible quantifiable issues. We have to focus on the qualitative that will keep us in the diaspora. There is a bigger, deeper feeling attached to the region and that feeling we should foment.

The government is not in the position to attract brain gain anymore because there is not enough funding for example. But the reality is that if we do not invest in keeping them they have no reason to stay.

### Perspective as an immigrant:

Anni Corridor from Venezuela, was invited to work as an architect for more than four years. After graduating Corridor lived in the United States where she was under paid but persevered regardless. She had the opportunity to stay in the U.S. but she decided to go back to Venezuela because she missed her Country. As the living situation worsened in Venezuela, Corridor was given the opportunity to come to Curaçao to help a fellow architect. At the moment the policy to only receive ninety-day per year stay permit as an immigrant made it possible for her to work in several projects in Curacao while studying in Chile. Coming to the island allowed her to explore the culture and create a name as an architect. Later she was given the opportunity to work as an official architect. "Even though the culture here might seem to be closed, it is very open and we should see this as an attracting point for professionals from abroad": said Corridor while emphasizing that Curacao has more to offer to the emigrant besides a safe and comfortable Caribbean life-pace.

### Perspective as someone that came back:

We can frame migration from two perspectives to our own diaspora. Hearing about our own people their experience will really tell us what we can do to help maintain the connection. During hurricane Irma and hurricane Maria it was possible for Saint Martin to re-emerge because the diaspora mobilized and helped tremendously, through platforms. Matter of fact those platforms are still being used for



the diaspora to communicate and share with each other. Knowing that there is expertise and knowledge in our own diaspora it's important to facilitate the communication of the diaspora and our country like building a platform where people can communicate.

Even though we see education as a means to high our economy, we have not invested in thinking and being critical about our reality. What are we? Where what is our goal? What do have? We also have to think of keeping our youngs longer. Of course they will break easily, we do not allow them to experience an adult life here, and instead we send them away immediately.

It is true that diaspora mobilizes after crisis. The IOM makes a diaspora mapping. Making sure that there is data collection of the diaspora is a great way of keeping the contact with their country of origin and is a way to keep them engaged. This plan needs funding but is a possibility to be done for the Dutch Caribbean countries through a petition.

As someone that came back, I came back because I had to take care of my mother. We keep coming back to how do we keep our younger generations while the important part is making sure they can come back, that should be the focus.

We need to realize that we need to let go of the (sad feeling) of our kids leaving and instead offer incentives to bring immigrants that will do the work and change the idea that we don't have opportunities is not true. Other perspective.

Brain drain/gain should be seen as a dam of water. We can plan and use it to produce electricity and life or just let to flow come and go without purpose. Because the diaspora has a climate of its self and can react or act in contrast with the development of the country.

In Aruba they are being more active in presenting the needs of the country to attract the diaspora instead of waiting for them to come back.

The representation abroad for the diaspora it's just as important, it must make clear what the needs of the country are.

**Question 4:** "What are three stepping stones to go about the brain gain/drain?"

Time changes and the country will change and its importance is to share the knowledge and experience of staying or coming back. A person could be worth more after returning and that is something worth sharing we need to change the narrative of brain drain/ gain. Share with people that if you stay you gain. There is a reason for the "rich" to come here have villas here, let's exploit it ourselves.

Create a standard, we need to design a magnet: Indigenous people in Latin America use the term *smaquasai* to define living well in a holistic way, healthy and sustainable in interaction with the climate. This is what we should look for and sell as attraction point. Define and list the needs to make this a reality. Define what our socio-economy must looks like before listing the needs and then recruit for it. And make sure to communicate, tell people where we are and where we are going.



## Part 2: The new feelings 3 Stepping Stones Elaborated

\*Attendees were asked to describe the first feeling when they heard of Brain Drain, Brain Gain.

Different Perspective, Hope, Stay Pragmatic, Define IT, Positive (Prime),  
Harmonious (Productivity), Manage (expectations), Self-determination,  
Opportunity, Planed

**Step 1:** Create a standard. Define what is living well. Defined by the necessities of the individual. We will want to develop a policy that asks for a holistic life. This will be a potential trigger for people to live in harmonious productivity. Actively look for the talent to support our opportunities. Shark tank events are a way of propelling faster innovation in a country and it's worth investing in.

We need to have an economic pillar, remember for example the oil refinery was maintained by foreign income and moved our economy. We need to create or define in what we want for this investment to go and we need to keep it sustainable. Think of points in time to evaluate the progress and adapt if necessary.

**Step 2:** Define and list the needed to make a it a reality. Inventorize what we need to work well. Define the standard like for example how Holland set the master's degree plan, but instead an excellence plan where people strive for excellence in every educational level and work position. Good balance. There is a mismatch between the careers we are providing and the education we want them (kids) to pursue. Self-determination, towards the goals we will set giving the space for collective development and growth considering the Human Rights factor. There must be policies to support and a guarantee that the standard is inclusive to all. Legislation, you need to be able to anchor your vision to something, this will show how serious you are about it.

**Step 3:** Communicate, there needs to be ONE story, everybody needs to be on the same page. And make sure the story is shared. Your need to put the money where your mouth is, we need to not only plan but implement. If you are going to do something you will need support. Without implementation we will only plan, we should develop implementation plans that initiate real-life development of the plans through time. The long-term result must be an aspiration of us all so we can work towards it at all times.

## Summary of the Session

**The Wave after Wave.** The highlights of the discussions and conclusions of this session was presented afterwards in a three-minute-presentation by mr. Richardson, with the help of a Power Point Presentation titled Waves of Hope. The one-word *thoughts* and *feelings* given by the attendees were compared first to highlight how it is possible to change the perspective once we open dialogue and are able to consider all the perspectives. The result, the three steps to proper policy development to 'reverse the coin'. The 3 steps:

- **SEMAQUASAI: TO LIVE WELL**

step 1

- HOLISTIC
- HARMONIOUS PRODUCTIVITY
- CONTEXT OF THE ENVIROMENT

- **INVENTORY: TO WORK WELL**

step 2

- BALANCE
- MAPPING THE CREATED
- SELF DETERMINATION INDIVIDUAL|CORPORATE

- **COMMUNICATE: TELL THE STORY**

step 3

- TELL THE SAME STORY
- SUPPORT AND EXECUTE
- BENCHMARKING EXPECTATIONS

The biggest take away was that Brain Gain/Drain can be seen as a water wave that can be used with a purpose and an established goal. Even when in first instance the subject is a matter of concern seeing it become waves of hope for proper planning and implementation opened our eyes to Brain Gain, Brain Drain as a sea of opportunities.