Capacity development, training and research uptake

PO - (8573) - RESEARCH, MENTORSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: IS RETIREMENT AGE A HURDLE TO RESEARCH SUSTAINABILITY IN AFRICA: VIEWPOINTS

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Introduction: Retirement age in most of Sub-Saharan Africa is between 55 and 60 years, even in academic and research institutions. There is no mechanism to retain even the few most experienced and outstanding among them. There is evidence that institutions retaining experienced researchers access better big research grants.

Methods: We conducted literature review and also shared views and experiences among peer research scientists

Findings: Most African scientists obtain their first degrees aged 25-30 years. This compounded by economical needs and work experience requirements for PhD studies delays their research career development such that most graduates for a PhD aged 40-50 years. However, unlike in developed world where majority acquire their PhDs at their late 20's or early 30's, there is no mechanism to retain them longer at work to maximize their contributions to scientific developments. Instead, African scientists are forced to retire young at 60 years of age. On the contrary, developed countries scientists graduate earlier, work longer and have retention mechanisms even after retirement. African countries do not consider retaining even the few who have demonstrated most outstanding performance. Consequently, outstanding research scientists retire at the time when they are needed most. They seek and get jobs abroad or in externally owned projects (brain drain). Their decade or so of work, generates more resources abroad, depriving Africa of resource generating capacity pool. Secondly, retiring at the height of their performance is economically counterproductive. Thirdly, this affects negatively career development of young scientists for lack of experiences supervisors and mentors.

Conclusion: Africa must rethink the retirement age of research scientists and create incentives to retain outstanding research scientists reaching retirement age. This is urgently needed to stop brain drain, contribute to economic development and accelerate ongoing efforts of building sustainable research capacity and mentorship programs in Africa.