

## **Recruitment for Africa**

It is a well-known fact that South Africa has one of the strongest economies in Africa, and that this, with the skills shortage problem that we are currently experiencing, makes South Africa one of the most attractive countries for foreign African professionals to seek employment in. However, if one looks at the ratio between the number of foreigners coming in to SA for work purposes and the number of South African citizens who settle in other African countries for employment opportunities, the scale is far from balanced. A large number of established South African corporations operate in other countries on the African continent; however (when looking at the vast number of open vacancies) it does not seem as if enough is being done to make South African job seekers aware of opportunities in those countries.

When queried about the apparent lack of advertising of African opportunities, a leading supermarket chain with stores in 12 African countries said that SA citizens are selected from within the organization and they are sent to other countries purely for setting up purposes. Once the store is operational, the attention is shifted on to the locals with the focus being the upliftment of the surrounding communities through job creation. A noble idea, but what becomes of the South Africans? The team, bar the general manager, is sent back to SA to wait for another start-up project. Their role is solely to train the locals and provide them with enough skills to operate the store according to the company's guidelines. This is all very well but if you consider the high levels of unemployment we have in this country, and the fact that most foreigners who settle in SA do so with the intention of remaining part of SA's workforce indefinitely, this hardly seems like a fair trade.

South African corporates are not the only ones to blame for this scenario.

Most recruitment and head-hunting firms do very little about making placements in the rest of Africa. One just has to look at the employment section of any newspaper and look for adverts that are advertising opportunities outside of SA. Of the 217 employment ads found in a leading Sunday newspaper's career section (Sunday 22 April 2007), 6 ads are of overseas vacancies in countries such as the Middle East, the United Kingdom and the USA, and only 2 are advertising opportunities in Kenya and Angola respectively. We have the communication infrastructure available and travel has become easier than ever before. It is baffling as to why we are not exploring the opportunities that lie beyond our borders, but within our continent.

Some might argue that there are other obstacles such as rapidly weakening economies, political unrest, civil wars etc. which make certain African countries less likely to attract potential talent. True, however this is not the case for all countries. On the contrary, some countries are performing better from an economic viewpoint than South Africa is, i.e. Botswana, and political unrest is unheard of in countries like Namibia.

The mindset of the South African workforce also needs to be shifted slightly. Despite the fact that 60% of South African professionals have never traveled to other African countries, we are quick to shoot down any suggestion of relocation. We are much happier to consider overseas opportunities than those on our own continent. We have allowed our judgment to be clouded by the negative images that we see in the media, so much so that the idea of leaving one's comfortable backyard and going to live in a 'poor' country is totally unthinkable. We'd never consider it, let alone go through with it.

What the SA private sector, recruitment industry and the workforce seem to be failing to recognize is that the African continent stands to benefit tremendously should a liberal transfer of skills take place. Countries like Nigeria, the world's 4<sup>th</sup> largest oil producer, soon to be supplying ten percent of the United State's petroleum needs, require a myriad of professionals, from

engineers to accountants, while Tanzania, the world largest producer of Tanzanite, needs mining professionals.

The SA government must be commended for the steps it has started to take towards addressing the skills transferal problem. According to another leading Sunday newspaper (Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2007); Home Affairs Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula last week announced that SA intends on attracting 35 000 skilled foreign professionals in the next year. To aid this process, 34 825 quota work permits have been made available for 53 occupations. Quota permits allow foreign professionals with the relevant qualifications are no qualified South Africans available for the job, before hiring a foreigner with a quota work permit. The minister admitted that SA is mostly in need of professionals in the science and engineering sectors, but that veterinarians, call centre managers and teachers are also in high demand.

One can't help but wonder if special provision has been made to issue a higher percentage of the quota work permits to African professionals as opposed to their overseas counterparts.

and experience to come to SA and look for work, without having secured employment in advance. Employers are not required to prove that there

Although one cannot underestimate the value of all forms of skill from all over the world, the African continent needs a cross pollination of its own professionals if it is to compete with leading continents such as Europe and North America.

Successful transfer of skills throughout the continent could potentially lead to the upliftment of many an economy, the eradication of poverty and the gradual rise of certain countries from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> world classification.

So what is the way forward? A number of options could be explored, for instance (1) other African governments can take a leaf out of the SA government's book by issuing quota work permits to foreign African professionals, (2) the SA recruitment industry can facilitate this process by partnering with foreign African recruitment firms and exchanging the relevant talent, and (3) workshops 'selling' other African countries could be held around South Africa in a bid to change the SA citizens' negative attitude towards living and working in other African countries.

The upliftment of our continent should be a concern for all Africans and the onus is upon all of us to ensure that Africa does indeed progress for the benefit of future generations. We need ordinary citizens and various significant stakeholders in both business and governments working towards this common goal.

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