

Aid for whom? Facilitating skilled migration through the Czech government scholarship programme for students from developing countries

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Panel B10: *International knowledge migration*

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Abstract

The Czech government scholarship programme for university students from developing countries has a long history dating back to the Cold War cooperation of Czechoslovakia within a Soviet-led socialist bloc of countries. In 1990s it became a part of the Czech development cooperation programme and since then it has been fully funded from the Czech official development aid budget. In this paper, we examine the selected programme's development impacts. In particular, we focus on the scholarship beneficiaries from Africa. We acknowledge that development-oriented international scholarships programmes may be conceived from different theoretical perspectives that may lead to different expected outcomes. Therefore, we confront the development outcomes identified for the Czech scholarships programme against these distinct perspectives. We focus on issues such as the return migration after graduation, or transformative power of scholarships with regard to individual's capabilities, among others. Our analysis is based on quantitative and qualitative data collected for the programme's two consecutive external evaluations (2011, 2018). The research covered the period from 2008 to 2017 in which around 1,100 beneficiaries from more than 60 developing countries were financially supported.

Key words: skilled migration, international scholarships, development cooperation, Africa

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Introduction

Sponsoring studies of citizens from developing countries at universities in developed countries has been for decades an instrument of official development aid of many 'Western' donors. The recent inclusion of development-oriented international scholarships among targets of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 further legitimated these traditional schemes and encouraged 'emerging' donors to introduce such programmes. In general, international scholarship programmes contain a clear migration-development aspect and can thus be considered as an instrument of high skilled-labour and knowledge migration. The more urgent it seems to analyse impacts of the development-oriented scholarship programmes financed from development aid budgets. Their expected development impacts, most typically grounded in the idea of 'exporting' university knowledge from more to less developed countries, depend on several uncertain parameters. Despite their officially declared development focus, they may further exacerbate rather than reduce the increasingly unequal distribution of benefits from internationalization of higher education. Moreover, the risk of brain drain or adverse impacts on educational institutions in developing countries have been apparent. Important question arises then, to whom such aid is beneficial?

Czechoslovakia (and lately Czechia) has been providing tertiary scholarships to students from the South since 1950s already. During the transformation period of 1990s, scholarships have become an integral part of the newly established Czech development cooperation programme, consuming around 10 percent of its bilateral aid budget these days (MFA, 2020). The recent strategy of the programme (for years 2013-2018) declares that the main goal of the programme is 'to contribute to human development and poverty alleviation and thus to the overall socio-economic development of scholarships beneficiaries' home countries' (MFA, 2012). The other two declared goals such as 'to strengthen the bilateral relations between Czechia and the beneficiaries' home countries' and 'to enhance the involvement of Czech universities in international cooperation' are considered as secondary benefits of the scholarships provision.

In this paper, we present results of our research on development impacts of the Czech scholarships programme and in particular, we focus on participants from Africa in order to examine whether and how they differ from the rest of our sample. We acknowledge that development-oriented international scholarships programmes may be conceived from different theoretical perspectives that may lead to different expected outcomes. A clarification of theoretical perspective is very useful for understanding of the assumed programme's logic, its expected outcomes and, ultimately, its development impacts. Therefore, we confront our results of the research on development impacts of the Czech programme with three selected theoretical perspectives (human capital model, rights-based model, and capability

model) to better answer the question to whom such an aid instrument benefits. Selection of these theoretical perspectives was based on Campbell and Mawer (2018) and differences in expected impacts (if comprehended from these theoretical perspectives) are outlined in Table 1. More details are in our latest research (Novotný et al, 2020b), currently being under review in a journal. In particular, we investigate the four following parameters of the programme: targeting of the programme, graduation rate, home return rate, motivations, and transformative power of scholarships. All of them reflect in all three above mentioned theoretical perspectives.

Our analysis is based on quantitative and qualitative data collected for the programme's two consecutive external evaluations (Horký et al., 2011; Feřtřová et al., 2018). The research covered the period from 2008 to 2017 in which around 1,100 beneficiaries from more than 60 developing countries were financially supported. Selected results of these evaluations have been published already in academic journals (Němečková et al., 2014; Hejkrlík et al., 2018; Novotný et al., 2020a). They focused either on the programme evaluation (Němečková et al., 2014), or on its development impacts, mostly from the migration perspective (Hejkrlík et al., 2018; Novotný et al., 2020a). This paper thus mostly summarizes and presents our research on the topic and also brings some new results related to the focus on African students.

The paper is organised as follows. In the first part it briefly introduces the Czech government scholarships programme for students from developing countries. In the next part, data and research methodology is presented. In the next section, we present our results with a special focus on African students.

Table 1. Expected impacts of scholarship programmes if comprehended from different theoretical perspectives

Model	Objectives (expected impacts)	
	Micro-level	Macro-level
Human capital model	Attained education and skills that increase the individual's productivity and income.	Enhancement of human capital in the home country that translates to its socioeconomic development and competitiveness.
Rights-based approach	To assure access to quality higher education for those who do not have it.	Enhancement of human rights. Reduction of social inequality.
Capability approach	To expand capabilities (opportunities and abilities) and freedoms to make responsible choices.	Human development conceived as multi-dimensional well-being.

Source: Authors based on Novotný et al. (2020b) who draw on Campbell and Mawer (2018)

The Czech scholarships programme for students from developing countries

Czechoslovakia has been providing development aid since early 1950s when it joined the Soviet-allied bloc of countries. At that time, provision of tertiary scholarships to students from 'like-minded' socialist countries was the main aid instrument. Czechoslovakia as one of the few countries at that time even established a special university for these incoming students (University of 17th November). However, due to financial problems and rising racist attacks it has been closed a few years after (Holečková, 2010, p.27). Nevertheless, the idea of scholarships provision has remained. During 1980s the programme reached its peak when around 800 scholarships per year were provided for newcomers (Jelínek et al., 2004, p. 14). During the following decade, the newly established Czechia (1993) joined, among others, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and gradually started the process of transformation into an 'emerging' development aid donor. To some extent surprisingly, the tertiary scholarships programme as a representative of the old 'socialist' aid instrument was not abandoned and has become an integral part of the new Czech development cooperation programme. But unlike previous times, the number of newcomers has significantly decreased (Němečková et al., 2014). Since academic year 2008/2009 the programme has provided scholarships to around 600 students per year with the limit of 130 newcomers every year (MFA, 2020). Eligible countries have transformed from socialist countries into a wide range of developing countries reaching up to 92 in 2003 (Němečková et al., 2014, p. 84). Subsequently, the number of eligible countries has decreased with intention to focus only on priority countries of the Czech development cooperation programme. The programme accounts for about 10 percent of the bilateral Czech development cooperation budget (MFA, 2020).

In the examined period of 2008-2017 the programme financially supported around 600 students per year. The programme covers tuition fees for full degree university studies either in the Czech language (i.e. the only official language in Czechia) or in the English language, programme beneficiaries also receive scholarships and have the medical expenses covered. According to the official strategy for the period of 2013-2018 (examined period), three main goals of the programme have been defined: i) to contribute to human development and poverty alleviation and thus to the overall socio-economic development of scholarships beneficiaries' home countries, ii) to strengthen the bilateral relations between Czechia and the scholarships beneficiaries' home countries, iii) to enhance the involvement of Czech universities in international cooperation (MFA, 2012). Definition of goals suggests that analysis of *whom this aid benefits* has rather wide and unclear parameters which further complicate

evaluation of its development impacts. Table 2 shows more in detail parameters of the programme from its theory of change perspective.

Table 2. The theory of change of the Czech scholarships programme according to the official strategy for the period 2013-2018

Recognised inputs	Planned activities	Declared intermediate objectives	Declared ultimate goals
Costs of education, scholarships, health expenses, administration costs.	The selection process.	To provide access to a high quality tertiary education.	To contribute to human development and poverty alleviation and thus to the overall socio-economic development of the home countries.
	Administration and organisational support for programme beneficiaries.	To provide access to education to those who cannot afford it in their home country.	
	Pre-study Czech language courses and other supportive activities.	To strengthen the personal relationships of the graduates to Czechia.	To strengthen the bilateral relations between Czechia and the beneficiaries' home countries.
	Studies at Czech public universities.	To stimulate the demand of other (fee-paying) international students for enrolment at Czech universities.	To enhance the involvement of Czech universities in international cooperation.
	Alumni activities.	Meeting commitments of Czechia regarding ODA provision.	

Source: Adopted from Novotný et al. (2020b) who analysed MFA (2012)

Data and methods

All primary data for our research come from two consecutive external evaluations of the Czech scholarships programme carried out in 2011 (Horký et al., 2011) and 2018 (Feřtrová et al., 2018). Some data were obtained from the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports registries, others via questionnaire surveys among (at that time) current and former programme beneficiaries. For the 2011 evaluation, the questionnaire sample accounted for 204 respondents, for the 2018 evaluation it contained 430 respondents. The first evaluation also run questionnaire surveys among the Czech embassies actively involved in the scholarships beneficiaries selection process (N=27). Moreover, qualitative interviews were conducted to triangulate the data. For the 2011 evaluation, 12+ interviews with public officers were conducted and for the 2018 evaluation, 62 semi-structured interviews with experts, programme officers, representatives of Czech universities, and programme beneficiaries were conducted. Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis were applied. For more details on data and methodology, please see Němečková et al. (2014) and Novotný et al (2020a), or both original evaluation reports, respectively. But these reports are in Czech language only (Horký et al., 2011; Feřtrová et al., 2018).

For the purpose of this paper, we further analysed data on African students collected via the questionnaire surveys. For the 2011 evaluation, in total 48 respondents (out of 204 in total, i.e. 23.5 percent) from 13 African countries responded, with most respondents being from both Angola and Ethiopia (8), coincidentally the only two Czech development cooperation priority countries located in Africa. Most of them were actively involved in the programme, only minority (7) already finished (successfully) their studies and 3 reported their temporary abortion. For the 2018 evaluation, in total 103 respondents from Africa were in our sample (13 from North Africa and 90 from Sub-Saharan Africa) that means 23 % of the entire sample (N = 430). The most represented countries were Zambia (20 respondents), Ethiopia (16), Namibia (10), Egypt (9) and Zimbabwe (7).

Results

In this section, we present our results of research on selected programme's parameters and in addition for this paper, we present results on African students. To that note, official data provided by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports covering the period 2008-2017 indicated that 235 students of 1,074 in total (21.9 percent) were coming from Africa. 44 were from North Africa and 191 from Sub-Saharan Africa. Only 7 percent of North African students were females, while among students from Sub-Saharan Africa, this share was three times higher (24 percent).

Results of analysis of the programme's parameters

We present here results of analysis of selected four parameters of the programme, i.e. i) targeting at the individual level, ii) graduation rate, iii) home return rate, and iv) motivations and transformative power of scholarships.

I) Targeting of the programme at individual level

One of the declared intermediate objectives of the programme is 'to provide access to education to those who cannot afford it in their home country'. Both questionnaires surveys suggested that around two thirds of respondents considered economic situation of their family at time of application to be around their country average. Interestingly, African respondents in 2011 survey indicated that in majority (65.5 percent) the economic situation of their family was below average. In 2018, the evaluation searched for education background of parents of selected scholarship beneficiaries. Majority of them (67 percent) stated that both parents completed a university degree and only 10 percent declared that their parents had only primary education. Although the African respondents reported on average significantly less educated parents (46 percent of them completed university and 25 percent completed high school) than the rest of our sample, it is clear that both in African and other countries the programme on average targets students from relatively educated, though not necessarily rich families. Even more notably, we found that a large part of respondents had studied university already before they applied for the Czech scholarships. Majority of respondents participating in the 2018 survey also mentioned that they would have studied university even without the scholarship programme. From theoretical perspective, these results do not collide with the rights-based approach of the logic of the programme.

ii) Graduation rate

Acknowledging that scholarship beneficiaries may benefit from participation on the programme even without successful completion of their studies, we assume that the programme's goal is to reach the highest graduation rate and the best usage of gained skills and knowledge in graduates' professional lives. However, this showed to be one of the main programme's weaknesses. During the 2011 evaluation it was revealed that on average only 29 percent of scholarship beneficiaries successfully finished their studies (Němečková et al, 2014, p. 89). Unfortunately, persisting rather poor results have been confirmed even by the 2018 evaluation. The graduation rate has increased though, but to around 50 percent only (Feřtrová et al, 2018). Low graduation rate can be considered as inefficient costs spending, or waste brain (Hejrlík et al, 2018). It significantly lowers acquisition of the main goal, i.e. to increase the human capital in developing countries. Students from Africa revealed somewhat lower dropout rate. However, after controlling for other factors such as sex (with a lower dropout rate of females) and level and language of study (lower dropout rates for those studying Master degree and programmes in English and not in Czech), differences in dropout rates of African and other students were not statistically significant.

iii) Return migration rate after graduation

Acknowledging that scholarship beneficiaries may be beneficial for their home countries development even when residing in other than home country after their studies, we assume that the main goal of the programme (confirmed by interviews with respected authorities) is to provide high quality education and motivate graduates to return to home countries to practise their skills and knowledge there. However, the Czech government does not legally bind scholarships beneficiaries to return home after graduation, nor follows their migration and career paths. So not only the decision of their migration path is solely up to them, but also there are no official data available, so we had to estimate the home return rate based on questionnaires surveys only.

In 2011, intervals for the extent of the brain-mobility related phenomena were estimated with the mean values of 45 percent for brain gain (i.e. graduates return home after graduation), 15 percent for brain circulation (i.e. graduates stay in donor or other country only for a limited period of time with a clear intention to gain the first work experience before returning home) and 30 percent for brain drain (i.e. graduates stay in donor country or leave to other one), (Hejrlík et al, 2018). In 2018, the results were even more pessimistic. The return rate among alumni respondents (who were on average 2.85 years after the end of their study) was only 31 percent, while 19 percent moved to another country and 50 remained in Czechia (Feřtrová et al, 2018). One has to understand that these results were,

among others, influenced by i) rather poor performance of the Czech economy around 2009/2010 (shortly before 2011 evaluation) and vice versa, ii) a very good condition of the Czech economy in the coming years (during the 2018 evaluation). But it cannot be attributed to the economic situation of the donor country only. There are also other factors which motivate students to decide about their migration paths (see for more details Hejkrlik et al. 2018; Novotný et al. 2020a).

In 2011, African students in vast majority indicated intention to return to their home countries upon completion of studies. But interestingly (though the data are not relevant for such a small group of students), 5 of African 7 graduates in the 2011 sample mentioned that they still stay in Czechia after completion of their studies, one confirmed the return to home country and one indicated residence in another country (South Africa). This indicates that plan might not collide with the actual migratory behaviour. In the 2018 survey, 62 percent of African respondents indicated their intention to return home after the end of study. Interestingly, the intention of return was significantly higher for respondents from Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia compared to the rest of the sample. We found that it is related to the perception of normative pressures; African respondents reported more often than others that their families expect them to return home. At the same time, they mentioned comparatively higher concerns with regard to their employability in their home countries after the return. Overall, the results clearly show that the low return rate largely prevents the programme's logic derived from the human capital model (where the return to home country represents a critical parameter) to materialize.

iv) Motivations and transformative power of scholarships at the individual level

Motivations to study abroad differ. 41 percent of respondents in our 2018 questionnaires survey reported that their main reason was that they wanted to study anywhere in Europe, while 38 percent stated that it was because of their interest in the field of study they applied for. Somewhat less of our respondents mentioned the perceived quality of education in Czechia as the main motivation (15 percent), but it was more frequently reported among other reasons (45 percent chose this alternative as a secondary reason). Also, material conditions (e.g. scholarship, living costs) were rarely mentioned as a primary motivation but more often appeared among the reported secondary reasons (in 67 percent of cases). In 2018 questionnaires survey, African students more frequently than others confirmed that the quality of education in Czechia was their main motivation. Also, they comparatively more often than rest of the sample reported their interest in the field of study as the main motivation (in 54 percent of cases).

As numerous responses in our questionnaires surveys suggested, scholarship beneficiaries highly appreciated the opportunity not only to receive education, but also ‘to learn new language’, ‘to become more independent’, or to simply ‘open own eyes’ (responses from focus groups in 2011 evaluation). Respondents in 2018 questionnaires survey deeply acknowledged (more than 90 percent of them) the following benefits: acquisition of a life perspective, expertise and skills, improving one’s position at the labour market, an opportunity for career growth, and acquisition of social competences (Feřtrová et al, 2018). African students in our 2011 questionnaires survey mostly acknowledged new educational skills, a chance of getting familiar with new friends and culture. In 2018, African respondents were similarly positive about the added value of their experience from abroad (including but also beyond obtained university education) as the rest of respondents. Both experience and quality education is capability enhancing and leads to transformative power at individual level. The Czech programme thus seems to perform well in this regard, which holds similarly to scholarships beneficiaries from Africa and elsewhere.

Conclusions

In order to better understand and answer the question of ‘to whom’ provision of scholarships helps, we confronted our findings on impacts of the Czech scholarship programme with the programme logic inferred from three selected theoretical perspectives, i.e. the human capital theoretical model, rights-based model and capability model (Table 1). For this purpose, four parameters of the programme were examined. Additionally, we analysed data on African students to see whether and how they differ from others.

The findings uncovered that the Czech programme demonstrates some deficiencies, particularly when examined through the lenses of the human capital and the rights-based perspectives. By contrast, it seems to perform well when assessed from the perspective of capability approach. The latter means that it helps to individual beneficiaries to transform their lives and to expand their capabilities (abilities and opportunities) and freedoms to make responsible choices about their future life. However, while these positive micro-level impacts can certainly be seen as a precondition for attaining a broader social change, whether and how this happens remains unclear. The primary focus on individual micro-level is a common critique of the capability approach. Our findings were not informative about whether and how individual-level benefits of scholarships transform to more aggregate outcomes. This is definitely a crucial area for the future research.

The reasoning about the expected outcomes of scholarships derived from the human capital model and rights-based model is more explicit regarding the presumed macro-level impacts. We nevertheless found that the programme logic inferred from the human capital model is impaired by low graduation rate and low return rate of beneficiaries to their home countries. Similarly, with respect to the rights-based approach we found that the Czech programme fails short with regard to the declared goal of providing access to university education to those who otherwise would not have it. Our research on African students suggests that these students somewhat differ to others. They show lower dropout rate and higher motivation to return home after studies. Being this true, this would increase the possibility to reach the goal of the programme, i.e. to help the countries of their origin (and also expand beneficiaries of the aid). But with regard to migration, we lack data to confirm it. In any case, the transformative power has been proven even in case of African students which further increases the role of scholarships as an aid instrument being the most beneficial at the individual level.

Our paper did not investigate further the other subordinated goals of the programme, i.e. 'to strengthen the bilateral relations between Czechia and the scholarships beneficiaries' home countries' and 'to enhance the involvement of Czech universities in international cooperation'. However, our research (Novotný et al. 2020b) indicates that the Czech programme performs rather weak in both areas and under-utilises the secondary benefits that provision of scholarships may bring to other involved stakeholders, mostly universities and state authorities. Many countries use this instrument as an important soft power instrument in foreign policy, for example.

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