

**International scholarships and home country civil service:
Comparing perspectives of government employment for social change
in Ghana and Nigeria**

Authors

Anne C. Campbell, Ph.D.¹
Corresponding Author
ORCID: 0000-0001-9896-8017
accampbell@middlebury.edu

Chelsea A. Lavalley, M.A., MPA¹
chelsealavalley@gmail.com

Erin Kelly-Weber, M.A., MPA¹
ORCID: 0000-0002-1457-0317
erinmkelly87@gmail.com

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¹ Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey
Graduate School of International Policy and Management

460 Pierce Street, Monterey, CA 93940 United States

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1. Introduction

Many international scholarship programs aim to provide high quality education and extracurricular programming so that graduates can return to their home countries to lead social change and catalyze development. Accordingly, a demonstrated aptitude for leadership is often a key criterion for winning one of these prestigious awards (Musa-Oito, 2018), as is the expectation, either formal or implicit, that the scholarship recipient will apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills back home. Leadership development and capacity building are also put forth as major justifications for why substantial sums are invested in one individual. The predominant logic holds that scholarship graduates will become opinion-leaders, help shape the future of bi-national relations (Wilson, 2015), bring back new technologies and governance skills (Perna et al., 2015), and promote policies and programs for marginalized populations (Martel, 2019). As further support, the Sustainable Development Goal Target 4.b included a specific call to “substantially expand” international higher education scholarships, with Sub-Saharan Africa and small island developing states among the regions targeted.

At the same time, national development is complex, enlisting a multitude of actors, networks, and systems to promote change over time. National government has a significant role in driving change and providing public services for all individuals, requiring a competent bureaucracy that is strong but limited in its power, with clear boundaries between public and private activities (Root, 2001). National and local governments’ role in upholding social justice includes inviting marginalized individuals into the policy discussions, designing and regulating fair and inclusionary policies and access to justice under these policies, ensuring equity of opportunity, and directing funds towards marginalized populations.

While international scholarship recipients and their networks are seen as active in influencing policies and working in government, there is less documentation which examines the systems themselves, notably how the home country context may influence the alumni choices by constraining or opening pathways. While research has examined employment opportunities available to international scholarship alumni upon their graduation (see Campbell, 2017; Enkhtur, 2019; Martel, 2019), there is very little examination of the interplay between the home country government and alumni pathways.

This paper examines the alumni trajectories of graduates sponsored by the Ford Foundation’s International Fellowships Program (IFP). IFP participants were expected to return to their home countries to contribute to social change upon their graduation. Through a comparative study of Ghanaian and Nigerian alumni, this research explores their perceptions of home country governance and government employment as they related to their employment pathways.

Specifically, this study focuses on being changemakers in, and employed by, government--an institution central to catalyzing sustainable change for its citizens. Findings point to contextual factors in the home country that significantly influenced alumni pathways and choices, noting that despite the quality or specific degree of higher education, the home country context--and perceptions of government efficacy, in particular--is important in influencing the trajectories of future "opinion leaders."

2. Literature Review

This paper starts with the broader literature about international scholarship programs for national development, followed by sections on scholarships and employment, and scholarships and government employment, specifically. In this paper, we define government employment as formal, permanent employment within the civil service, at either the national or local level. For this research, we do not include elected officials as government employees, mostly because there were few signs of this in the data. *[Additional sentence removed to preserve identity of author.]* A careful focus on civil service employment allowed alumni to share their perceptions of merit-based employment within the government.

We define social change similarly to the IFP Alumni Tracking Study (Kallick, et al., 2017), where social change is "an evolving movement that embodies the prevailing social, economic and political struggles within a society," noting that alumni are working on "emergent problems that their communities now face" (p. 3), and emphasizing that one must be familiar with the context and current issues in order to address them.

2.1 Scholarships and leadership for home country change

There is mounting evidence of various ways that alumni of international scholarship programs "give back" or lead change at home, fueled either by personal motivation or by funder expectations. These outcomes are often in line with a human capital framework, which states that the investment in an individual provides economic and social returns for the home country. In a 2015 study published in this journal, Perna, et al. found that ministry officials, program administrators, employers, and scholarship recipients all believed that the national scholarship program of Kazakhstan, the Bolashak Scholars Program, was preparing "the next generation of leaders of the country" (p. 89), concretely linking the tenants of a return on investment with leadership for change.

Evidence shows that many scholarship programs available to citizens of Ghana and Nigeria, the two cases in this study, also adhere to this human capital logic. Poi (2018) noted that Nigerian scholarship programs, like those in many other developing countries, have a policy goal of "the return home of successfully graduated recipients to fill the skills gaps at home" (p. 2), congruent with a human capital model. On the side of personal obligations, Arhin-Sam (2019) noted that many skilled Ghanaians wanted to give back to their home society, "reflect[ing] a sense that they owe their home country something" and have "the interest of the country at heart" (p. 141). Even if they don't have a particular timeline for return, many skilled Ghanaian expats view

advancing change within Ghana as a guiding principle for their return (Arhin-Sam, 2019). In some cases, staying abroad for postgraduate study following the scholarship may also be a step towards gaining more skills and increasing the opportunities of “giving back” to one’s home country. In a study of Mastercard Scholars Program graduates, 33% were pursuing additional education 1.5 years after scholarship completion, with others noting that they sought additional education but faced financial constraints (Cosentino, et al., 2019).

Toward the goal of leading national-level change, scholarship programs select individuals based on leadership potential (Musa-Oito, 2018) or promote this as a program outcome (Martel, 2019). In a 2010 study examining Ethiopian, Madagascanian, and Ghanaian alumni of the Humphrey Fellowship Program, Dant examined how graduates applied the U.S. leadership training to their professional practice at home. Dant found that the ideas of democracy, leadership, and community were mostly useful to the alumni. However, Dant advocated that “future research on leadership in Africa pay more attention to the importance of macro-context and culture in developing leadership capacity in such individuals” (p. 3) and recommended context-based leadership activities, such as peer mentoring and experiential exercises. Increasingly, researchers are taking into account locally-specific notions of leadership and understanding of how change happens, as evidenced through regional studies (e.g., Kallick & Brown Murga, 2018) and comparative case studies (e.g., Campbell, 2017).

One area that is receiving greater attention is the rate of student return after graduation. For example, in a review of approximately 2000 graduates of the United Kingdom’s Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, Mawer et al. (2016) found statistically significant differences in rates of return by region. Notably, Nigeria was specifically mentioned as having a disproportionate number of alumni abroad. Similarly, Marsh et al. (2016) found that West African alumni returned home at a lower rate compared to East African and Southern African alumni in a study of African graduates from six universities in North and Central America. At the same time, there is some support for the claim that alumni who are in the home country are in a better position to lead social change (Campbell, 2017). A recent study in this journal (Campbell & Baxter, 2019) noted that alumni who have returned home work together to lobby for social change, influence policy, and build transnational networks with other social change organizations.

Notably, a significant number of scholarship alumni remain in the country where they were educated or emigrate to a third country. Baxter (2019) noted the pressure placed on Rwandan scholarship students to fulfill contradictory goals. Whereas the national government wanted scholarship recipients to return with new skills to foster development, the families of alumni often encouraged graduates to remain abroad, sending money home to support family needs. As Baxter wrote, these two competing expectations “created a double-bind for students and they perceived that they would be viewed as a failure” (p. 113) regardless of their decision.

2.2 Scholarship alumni employment and change

Several studies show that alumni view their primary contribution to their countries to be through employment (Campbell, 2017; Enkhtur, 2019). For some alumni, they return to their former employer, especially if they are sponsored and have a binding contract to return to these positions (see Perna, et al., 2015). For others, they change organizations or even careers. To these positions, there is an expectation that they are applying the skills learned overseas, although there is little research on the extent to which this new knowledge is--or can be--applied. For example, Azhgaliyeva, et al. (2017) found that graduates of the Bolashak program had a very high employment rate (above 95%), yet only 1% identified as entrepreneurs, implying that new business or other ideas were not broadly imported. Moreover, alumni themselves noted that contributions to policy reform and assistance with new program design are deemed as worthwhile measures of “giving back,” especially as better policies improve the livelihood of many (Campbell & Baxter, 2019). In addition, alumni may hire each other or work together, especially in higher education and government departments, developing a “critical mass” to influence organizational change (Mawer, 2018).

Related to this issue of applying new skills is the quandary of whether all overseas education is equally useful or applicable in the home country in regards to acquiring employment, leading change, and securing high income positions. For example, Lehr (2012) suggested that Cuban education might be appropriate for Ghanaian scholars because “education in socialist countries, precisely because it is somewhat lower-tech, may be more relevant to African countries that find themselves at the lower end of the technology spectrum,” and therefore the education would avoid cultivating graduates with “an attitude of perceived superiority of European-derived educational programs and degrees” (p. 97). Alongside this point is the question of whether employers value and seek change, and whether ideas from abroad are welcomed. Alumni of scholarship programs in Ghana and Nigeria have reported that they are eager to implement new ideas--such as applying innovative pedagogies in universities and mobilizing citizens to increase voting turnout--but realize that their ideas, and foreign credentials, are not always welcomed (Campbell, et al., 2020).

There is also sizable evidence that if scholarship alumni sense that they cannot apply their skills in their home countries, and if those skills are needed and well-paid elsewhere, well-trained individuals will emigrate (Marsh & Oyelere, 2018). Attractive overseas employment is just one of the “push and pull factors” that alumni consider in their post-scholarship pathways. Of course, for each individual, the push and pull factors vary and are complex. However, some seem relatively predictable by nationality. For example, the quality of governance in the home country influences emigration: Cooray and Schneider (2016) established a causal relationship between emigration and corruption, showing that “as corruption increases, the emigration rate of high-skilled migrants also increases” (p. 293).

2.3 Alumni perceptions of home country government work following scholarship

As knowledge about international scholarship programs grows, it is possible to get a better sense of how scholarship alumni perceive jobs in government employment and the extent to which they take up these opportunities. Kim (2008) noted that governments in transitioning and developing countries are competing against businesses and other sectors for the best talent; governments often lose the most talented graduates to other sectors. Poocharoen and Lee (2013) built on this point, comparing how the governments of Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore use pre-service bonded scholarships to develop their civil service capacity. In Malaysia, graduates are expected to work for the government for six to 10 years, and a portion of these scholarships are designated for indigenous and socially disadvantaged populations, bringing a more diverse population into government. However, the authors noted that these schemes are not equally effective in each country, with salary being a major factor in retaining talent after the bonding period ends. In a 2012 study, Tessema, Winrow, and TecleZION found that an Eritrean scholarship program for public servants resulted in only one-third of 674 participants returning to their government positions. Factors such as economic and political conditions, and lack of peace and stability--especially during the war with Ethiopia--were found to be significant factors.

In a study comparing the post-Soviet countries of Moldova and Georgia, Campbell (2017) found that alumni of international scholarships identified government employment as the right vehicle by which to make change in a post-communist context, where the government had previously regulated so many aspects of life. In addition, Campbell (2019) found that when the home country government might be shifting to a more democratic regime, scholarship alumni identified these as “critical moments” to be involved in shaping the future of their home country. Recently, Enkhtur (2019) found that Mongolian scholarship holders in Japan wanted to contribute to the political, economic, social, and legal structures in post-Socialist Mongolia. However, Enkhtur notes that despite this desire, “participants faced structural and institutional challenges returning to their workplaces, especially in government agencies and felt a general lack of supportive policies to efficiently utilize their expertise” (p. 5), even when they were bound to return to their public service position. Despite a desire to model professional ethics, alumni found roadblocks to returning to government positions amid instability, restructure, and systematic corruption. Enkhtur wrote, “With such practice and lack of policy mechanisms to support the scholarship aim, the meaning behind the binding agreement to strengthen the public sector is lost” (p. 8).

A review of this literature reveals the opportunity to understand how alumni engage in government employment and whether their employment is bringing change to their institutions and the country.

2.4 Research questions

To provide greater insight into the relationship between home country government and alumni pathways, the paper explores the following research questions:

- Do alumni of international scholarship programs see government careers as effective ways to promote social change and social justice in Ghana and Nigeria?
- What factors do scholarship program alumni consider in pursuing or remaining in government jobs?

3. Context

Brief summaries of the governments of and governance in Ghana and Nigeria, as well as the Ford Foundation's IFP, provide context for the paper's analysis. The first two sections focus on overviews of Ghana's and Nigeria's governments since independence, economic status, and the six main themes of the World Bank's World Governance Indicators: voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption (World Bank, 2019). In section 3.3, a brief overview of the IFP program is provided.

3.1 Ghana

Ghana gained independence from Britain in 1957, led by Kwame Nkrumah, the Republic's first president. After a period of military and single-party rule, a new constitution was established in 1992. Since this time, no party has ruled more than two terms, with mostly peaceful transitions between administrations. The most recent presidential election was held in 2016, and the next Ghanaian general election is scheduled in 2020. Ghana is a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In terms of economic growth, Ghana's Gross National Income (GNI) was 1,230 USD in 2010 and 2,130 USD in 2018, showing significant economic gains, and unemployment shifted from 5.3% in 2010 to 4.3% in 2019 (World Bank, 2020).

In terms of governance, Ghana has shown consistently above average scores in all six areas of the World Governance Indicators when compared to other ECOWAS countries (World Bank, 2019). Ghana has shown significant growth in the area of voice and accountability over the past 20 years, indicating the perceived extent to which citizens are able to participate in selecting government leaders, as well as freedom of expression and association. Gender parity within government is in line with global averages, with 25% of ministerial positions held by women (World Economic Forum, 2020). In terms of government effectiveness, Ghana ranks in the 25th to 50th percentile (World Bank, 2019). According to Transparency International (2019), Ghana has a perceived transparency score of 41 out of 100 and is ranked 80 among 180 countries. Freedom House gave Ghana a score of 82 and a designation of "free" in their 2020 Freedom in the World global report.

3.2 Nigeria

Nigeria became independent from Britain in 1960 and became a republic in 1963. The new republic struggled to unify diverse populations across a large country, complicated by a civil war and military dictatorship. The period known as "the Fourth Republic," started in 1999 and led by

President Obasanjo, set Nigeria on a democratic-minded course to the present day. In 2015, sitting president Goodluck Jonathan lost the election and conceded defeat to retired general Muhammadu Buhari. The most recent general election took place in February 2019 with Buhari being re-elected. Nigeria is a federal republic, with the president as head of state, government, and a multi-party system and also a member of ECOWAS. Nigeria's GNI was 2,140 USD in 2010 and 1,960 USD in 2018, indicating a slight recession, with overall unemployment moving from 3.8% in 2010 to 8.1% in 2019 (World Bank, 2020).

In terms of governance, Nigeria has scored about average or below other ECOWAS countries in all six areas of the World Governance Indicators (World Bank, 2019). Regarding government effectiveness, Nigeria ranks in the 10th to 25th percentile, below Ghana. Representation of women within government is relatively low, with only 8% of ministerial positions held by women (World Economic Forum, 2020). One of the great challenges in Nigeria is lack of security in the north, as militant groups target education. UNICEF (2020) reports that 10.5 million children are out of school in Nigeria, which is roughly 20% of the world's out of school youth. According to Transparency International (2019), Nigeria has a perceived transparency score of 26 out of 100 and is ranked 146 among 180 countries. In the 2020 Freedom in the World report, Freedom House (2020) gave Nigeria a score of 47 and a designation of "partially free."

3.3 International Fellowships Program

At its inception, the IFP was based on two lines of reasoning: (a) increased access to higher education by marginalized populations is an act of social justice, and (b) program graduates will gain knowledge that they can use to lead social change for others in their home countries (Dassin, 2009; Martel, 2019). While no specific post-graduate employment trajectories were prioritized by IFP, government employment was not discouraged. During the scholarship period (2001-2013), 4305 individuals from 22 countries participated, with a total budget of \$417 million USD. The Institute for International Education is conducting a 10-Year Tracking Study to determine the extent to which the IFP made an impact on social change.¹

Ghana and Nigeria were two of the pilot countries of the IFP program. Over the course of the program, 108 Ghanaians participated with 98% choosing universities outside of the country. Nigeria had a total of 175 participants, with 100% of the participants choosing to study overseas (Kallick & Brown Murga, 2018). In Ghana, the program was administered by the Association of African Universities (AAU) based in Accra. In Nigeria, the IFP program was administered by Pathfinder International, in collaboration with the AAU.

In each country, national advisory boards defined the eligibility criteria for the IFP. In Ghana, the focus was on individuals who had low socio-economic status, were a member of a socially excluded or marginalized group (e.g., religious group), lived in a rural area, or were women (IFP Ghana, 2003). Attention was given to those who worked in policy or for the government, especially within the Ghana Education Service, which offered a study leave opportunity. In

¹ Reports from a 10-year alumni tracking study are available at [IFP Alumni Tracking Study Reports](#).

Nigeria, the IFP's definition of socially marginalized populations appeared to encompass a range of disadvantaged backgrounds and identities, with special attention given to women from rural communities and the Muslim North, people with disabilities, and those from educationally disadvantaged regions (Kallick & Brown Murga, 2018).

4. Methods

The goal of this comparative study is to better understand how scholarship program alumni from Ghana and Nigeria perceive and seek employment in and as a response to their home country governments as a means to promote social change and social justice. Ghana and Nigeria were selected for this study given that they were both IFP pilot countries, are Anglophone West African countries, and are current members of similar regional initiatives, such as ECOWAS.

4.1 Research design

The study had two stages. First, the researchers reviewed over 600 archived files² related to the IFP scholarship program offered in Ghana and Nigeria from 2001-2013. These digital and paper documents are part of the Ford Foundation IFP Archive at Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Of these, 35 documents and reports were identified as relevant to alumni trajectories or participants' engagement with the government.

Second, the researchers composed an interview protocol based on these documents, consisting of 17 questions, plus probes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 alumni (10 each from Ghana and Nigeria) in person and by phone, Skype, and WhatsApp. These interviews intended to collect the alumni's current impressions of government work, as well as seek additional details about their career trajectories. Interviews were conducted in English, lasted 40 to 120 minutes, and all were recorded and transcribed.

4.2 Research participants

Participants are all alumni of the IFP in Ghana and Nigeria. As the IFP program targeted social justice, participants had completed Master's or PhD degrees in sustainable development or social policy-related fields (e.g., human rights, disabilities studies, education, or nursing). Participants were recruited through email invitations, social media, and alumni networks. Twenty-three responded and ultimately 20 alumni agreed to an interview.

Of the 10 Ghanaian alumni, participants studied in three countries (the Netherlands, the UK, and the U.S.), with their scholarships starting in years ranging from 2006 to 2011. Four of the 10 Ghanaian alumni are women. At the time of the interviews, five were working for the government of Ghana, and nine were living in Ghana. Of the 10 Nigerian alumni, participants studied in four countries (the Netherlands, South Africa, the UK, and the U.S.), starting their

² There were approximately 100 duplicates among these files, as multiple individuals contributed to the Archive and shared the same documents.

scholarships in the years between 2005 and 2011. Three of the 10 Nigerian alumni are women. At the time of the interviews, three were working for the government and seven were living in the country. In this paper the term “alumnus” is used as a gender neutral term.

4.3 Analysis

Files from the document review and the interview transcripts were used to create comprehensive memos for each country. The memos were shared with the interviewees from each country for feedback and were then used to create a single codebook, used for both document and interview transcripts. Data were coded using a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

For this paper, each case relied on both archival documents and interview transcripts to highlight meaningful perceptions and actions that alumni have taken in response to their home country government. After each case was developed, a comparative analysis was conducted in line with Ragin's case-oriented approach to comparative study (2013). This analysis exposed the categorical similarities and differences in the two cases, towards the goal of answering the research questions.

4.4 Methodological limitations

The study has two methodological limitations. First, in terms of the interview data, alumni perceptions are self-reported and based on diverse experiences, with the alumni interviewed being only a portion of the alumni working in government. Accordingly, when articulating their views about their home country government, interviewees' comments may be factually inaccurate and uncorroborated. To mitigate some of the variance, semi-structured interviewing allowed the research team to explore some topics and ask for clarification. In addition, many of the interviewees sent us their Curriculum Vitae, links to their offices, policy documents, reports, and other materials to help the researchers gain deeper insight into the issues and context of their work.

Second, the interviewees were not selected because they are experts in government reforms or policymaking. They are also not necessarily representative of the larger population of international scholarship alumni in each country, or even of the IFP program. This decision was made because our goal was not to evaluate whether a specific program is effective in influencing government policy change, but instead to explore the influence of home country government in international scholarship alumni pathways--especially to increase the data from countries beyond post-Soviet states and those in the Global North. In addition, we wanted to compare the experiences of the alumni from a single program to allow for a better base of comparison.

5. Cases

In each of the cases presented below, we explore alumni perceptions and experiences of working for their home country's government, including barriers to government employment. Factors that alumni consider when thinking of government employment, as well as careers pursued as an alternative, are also noted for each case.

5.1 Ghana

The majority of Ghanaian alumni stated that the IFP program prepared them well to be social justice leaders. They suggested that the program provided skills, new perspectives, connections, and an international degree that afforded them more credibility in applying for positions, as well as gaining respect for their policy decision making and social justice aims. One interviewee noted that the scholarship provided an important framework to understand their dreams, saying "the concept of social justice was implanted in my mind by IFP, actually" and continuing with, "All these ideas that are coming, I think the platform was provided for me by IFP. Perhaps if I didn't get the opportunity to do the master's, it would have remained my dream."

In terms of how they chose to work for social change following graduation, many suggested that the national government was a worthwhile outlet for them to pursue social justice. Alumni talked about being able to bring new ideas and knowledge to government, organize and lead trainings, raise attention to issues relevant to marginalized populations, and design and carry out policies. Working in the government was a way for alumni to "give back" and share what they had learned abroad. One alumnus noted that in a government job "you can help people to come up." In a Directory of West African Fellows (IFP West Africa, 2013) prepared when the program closed in 2013, 39% of the Ghanaian alumni were currently working for the government. As stated above, five of the 10 interviewees were working for the government at the time of interview (four of the five are male), with three working for the Ghana Education Service and two working for the Ministry of Food and Agriculture.

However, it is not clear the extent to which government jobs were universally considered as attractive to international scholarship program graduates. Some alumni suggested that a number of the IFP grantees in Ghana did not choose government careers after their scholarships. Instead, it was a post they returned to after their scholarship. Despite this, some saw that their work in government allowed them to implement social change outcomes when they returned. One male alumnus shared this vignette:

So after returning from the United States of America, I was tasked to organize a leadership and management workshop for [a large group of directors and institution heads] in the Northern Region, which I did using the experience and knowledge I gained from [scholarship university]. In fact, the results were very, very amazing as all the directors thought that what I was doing, it was like putting me in a box [and that] I should have been at a higher place, providing this kind of knowledge for the entire country.

Two other alumni (both male) mentioned that they were promoted after returning from the scholarship, although this seemed to be exceptional and not part of a previous arrangement. On the other hand, other alumni mentioned that government employees are promoted based on years of service, not degrees earned, merit, or ambition. One male alumnus who had previously worked for the government stated that “if you are coming in with expertise, you are doubted.”

Others suggested that working for government had its benefits: It provided a regular paycheck in a country with high unemployment, and other opportunities were limited, especially in rural areas. One interviewee put it this way, “Well, the government employs a number of people [and] why we’re in the government system? Sometimes we want to cause change and other times it is the job available for us to do.” Several alumni reported feeling “stuck” in their civil service jobs, with few opportunities to change positions, be promoted, or find attractive positions outside the government.

Still, other alumni have left the civil service. One female alumnus who left their post for a PhD abroad argued that their government position was too frustrating and they had to leave. The interviewee said that following their scholarship:

My main focus was to work and change policies within the educational sector, but I realized it's like boxing the system, like boxing with your boss. That's how the whole thing tends to be. What we are experiencing in the educational system is not something that one person can work towards in terms of policy, so it's maddening. The hierarchy that we run is from the head to the toe. Policies are made by the policymakers or the politicians or whatever, and it trickles down to us to implement it. The Ghana Education Service actually implements what the Ministry of Education has written down, so you cannot fight it.

Since alumni widely reported that they acquired ideas and skills in their scholarship programs, this inability to implement new ideas was particularly frustrating. They also found it exasperating that government work didn’t let them “exercise their full potential.” Additional frustrations with government jobs included a lack of encouragement to try new things, the perception of political parties and “politics” getting in the way of good policy making, low salaries compared to alumni qualifications, and poor work ethic among government employees.

When asked if they would consider working for the government in the future, the majority of alumni who were not employed by the government agreed they would consider it. However, all of them noted preconditions: They would need a salary with which to support their families and they should be able to apply their expertise and make changes, devoid of political parties and unnecessary bureaucracy. One alumnus said, “The government systems, the way the system works, I don’t like it, but if I’m offered a position, and I think I can bring some change into the organization, I would do it.” This alumnus’s emphasis on being asked to serve was echoed by others; many alumni shared that they didn’t aspire to government employment but saw the importance of helping their country in this way, if called upon.

The interviewees' desire to create social change in Ghana, along with the structural limitations of government posts, led several alumni to seek employment with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or to start their own. Six of the 10 interviewees mentioned starting--or attempting to start--their own NGO focused on rural development, education and training, or women's and disability rights. The motivation to start NGOs included providing services in rural communities, advocating for human rights, and solving their own unemployment problem.

For those who were currently employed by NGOs (either in national or international organizations), interviewees noted that these organizations addressed some of the limitations of civil service by providing more professional mobility and autonomy, as well as applying the skills they learned abroad. In addition, salaries were often higher than government posts. At the time of these interviews, the majority of funding for these NGOs was provided by international governments or the headquarters of the international organization, not the Ghanaian government.

5.2 Nigeria

All Nigerian alumni stated that the IFP program prepared them well to be social justice leaders. Alumni specifically mentioned that the program connected them to resources and other social justice advocates, allowed them to explore other cultures and practices, gave them additional skills and frameworks, built their confidence, and allowed them to gain a degree that helped to propel their careers. Alumni mentioned that they were able to apply their knowledge and skills in their professions and in community development volunteer projects, and to advance to higher levels of education.

Nigerian alumni expressed that government policymaking was an effective way to advance social change in Nigeria in theory, yet all agreed that the government was not doing enough in terms of social justice, especially for people at the margins. Moreover, there was a significant range of opinions on whether working in government was the right option for IFP alumni to promote social change. One interviewee noted that the Government of Nigeria has "100% role to ensure social justice and social change in Nigeria," yet continued, "If I'm to quantify what they have done so far... They have not done more than 50% [of their job]."

This view of the Nigerian government as being limited in its ability to effect social change was widely shared by alumni. Of the 10 interviewees, only three were working for government at the time of interview (all three are male) and two disclosed they were actively looking for other opportunities. One alumnus who works for government stated their outlook this way: "Working for government does not really give a person an opportunity, the space, and everything to accomplish his or her dreams." The alumnus continued, "In essence, there is no future for a person working for government in Nigeria except in very rare cases." Of the alumni listed in the 2013 IFP West Africa alumni booklet, 21% were listed as working in government.

Reasons that alumni did not work in government as a route to promote social change included perceived nepotism in hiring practices, low pay, perceived low ambition of employees, difficulty of making change, and perceived inability to critique the government. Alumni also noted that government work was not a sufficient way to bring in new ideas or education gained from abroad, saying that in public service, “You can’t really comment for innovation in terms of promotion of social justice,” suggesting that in government work, “you can’t have an impact using your fellowship orientation.” Another alumnus took this idea even further, reporting that “getting mixed up in government” challenges your credibility and puts your reputation as “a social change agent at stake.”

One additional deterrent from working for the government was the perception of corruption and inefficiency. One alumnus who worked for the government before and after the IFP scholarship put it this way:

Government work is not challenging, is not productive, and is marred by corruption. I don't know... Promotions are based on who you know, deployment is based on who you know or how much you can pay, and they always see me as a ruffian or a white man, who doesn't like taking bribes because of my orientation. I don't know. We are even stigmatized. Working for the state, working for the government is quite challenging, especially if you are not ready to go by their way, that is taking bribes, doing things different from what has been stated, beyond the standard order of operations.

This alumnus was not a single voice in calling attention to government corruption. In a meeting of IFP fellows in April 2009, fellows were asked to identify social challenges as part of an activity. In an early June 2009 news story in the *Peoples Daily*, written by IFP fellow, Musikilu Mojeed, it was reported, “The verdict was unanimous: the four groups identified corruption and the looting of the public treasury as Nigeria’s greatest bane, from which all other problems flow.” Mojeed went on to report, “Discussions then shifted to what we, as professionals, young Nigerians [...] being supported by Ford Foundation to acquire further education, could do to salvage our country from destruction and put it on the path to sustainable development.”

Despite the low interest in civil service employment, several alumni said they would consider working for the government if asked, although with caveats. Alumni stated that they would be open to government positions if they could have independence, be able to critique the government’s actions, and could advance social issues important to them, including voters’ rights, education, anti-corruption efforts, and citizen engagement. One alumnus spoke of their dreams to have a government position that would allow equal access to the polls for people with disabilities. The alumni continued by saying that government employment would allow advocacy for all “citizens have the right [to vote] and use that right to choose who their leaders are.” Another alumnus noted that their interest in civil service employment depended on whether Nigeria continued to improve its governance. The alumnus said, “Two or three years ago, I would have told you categorically no, that I won’t work for the government,” yet continued, “Somehow because of the situation we have found ourselves, you need to [work for government] if you really also want to [have] impact” in Nigeria today.

Instead of working with the government directly, many alumni chose to do the work of social change from outside the government. One former government employee stated that working in “the government [is] to be able to have impact,” however social justice can also be achieved through employment in NGOs, research centers, or think tanks. By working in these other entities in Nigeria or by conducting research on Nigerian issues from abroad, IFP alumni could “have the advantage in their places of work to have more impact with their position, to affect the changes that the government is making, [and] to have impact on the policymakers.” Some alumni believe their work writing reports, analyzing data and making projections, facilitating public-private partnerships, coordinating international donor funding, and building capacity in certain offices are significantly influencing the Nigerian government.

In working at NGOs, alumni spoke of having more freedom, the ability to use their skills and seek mobility, and better pay. One alumni said that working for an NGO allowed one to apply their scholarship education so the scholarship was not completed “in vain,” and continued, “If you come from a non-governmental organization, you have a louder voice. You can say what you want to say, and you are not afraid of someone stopping your salary. You can raise your voice; you can accuse the government. Nobody tries to muzzle you into not saying what you want to say.”

In addition, three of the alumni had started NGOs targeting rural development, education, and women’s leadership, although they reported that raising funds is a major challenge to sustain these efforts. Other alumni noted that they volunteered in and donated funds to various projects, especially in their rural home communities. One alumnus said they were able to advocate on behalf of their home village, providing an example of pressuring local government to supply electricity to the village. After the alumnus made a few calls, “Within a short time, government came out and installed electricity in our community. Again, when we are having issues with our water supplies, I also lead the community to make sure government intervened, and that problem was solved, actually.” Many alumni spoke about success with providing services on a local or community level instead of national policy reform.

6. Comparing the Cases

6.1 Similarities

In both Ghana and Nigeria, alumni noted that the IFP scholarship had prepared them well for work as social justice leaders. Likewise, they viewed government as the body that ultimately must bring about social justice and social change, although many alumni--especially in Nigeria--are skeptical about its ability to be effective given a number of barriers.

Moreover, alumni in both countries believed that government employment, for the most part, was a good career path for scholarship alumni to create change and “give back” to their home countries. However, alumni in both countries raised some doubts about whether it was a

suitable or effective route to promote social change. Ghanaians were more likely to see government employment as an effective pathway to bring about social change.

Notably, alumni in both countries were open to working for the civil service, especially if asked to participate at a higher post. This openness to work for government was not without stipulations; alumni in both countries mentioned that they wanted posts that allowed them to use their knowledge, have autonomy, and have a hand in influencing policy, especially policy that provided equality or opportunities for marginalized populations. It is notable that of the alumni currently working in government, four of the five Ghanaian alumni and all three of the Nigerian alumni are male; while this research did not set out to understand gender roles and possible gender bias in either government, the findings indicate that perhaps these results are influenced by gender. Alumni also noted that they sought working conditions that allowed them a decent salary, respect, autonomy, and a workplace with motivated colleagues. In addition, alumni in both countries--with a few exceptions--showed little to no interest in running for elected office or being active in political parties, and many explicitly noted that political parties were interfering with good governance.

Finally, both Ghanaian and Nigerian alumni identified working for NGOs as a good, or in the case of Nigeria, perhaps better, way to bring about social change--yet the ways alumni engaged in NGOs varied by country and individual. Ghanaian and Nigerian alumni were quite active in volunteering, sending remittances and donations, and other community activities. Alumni from both countries had started their own organizations, although more Ghanaians had chosen this route, and alumni from both countries mentioned funding and sustaining these organizations as ongoing challenges.

6.2 Differences

In terms of civil service employment, more alumni worked for government in Ghana, and they were more likely to report that social change was possible through the civil service. While there was a considerable range of opinion on whether government employment was a good strategy for alumni to influence social change, this pathway was far less attractive in Nigeria. Ghanaians raised concerns about the work culture in government and felt like they were in a "box" in their positions. While Nigerians who were employed by the government shared similar concerns, Nigerian alumni raised additional issues about the perception of corruption, inefficiency, and restrictions on personal agency in government. One even noted that personal credibility and reputation as a social change leader may be jeopardized by partnering with the government.

Further, Nigerians were more likely to seek employment in national NGOs, international NGOs, or abroad--and to try to influence social change and their government from these positions. Several said that despite the importance of having the government ultimately steer social change efforts, it was more effective or more tolerable to work on reform from outside. Ways that alumni attempted to influence policy change included through research, advising as experts, coordination of international funding, giving trainings, and through voter education and other citizenship education initiatives.

6.3 Factors that appear to influence alumni's employment in government

As with all employment choices, individuals must consider multiple factors when choosing whether to work in their country's civil service. According to the 20 alumni interviewed for this study, factors that attracted them to work in government positions, both in general and in specific positions, are (a) ability to influence social change and policymaking from within government, (b) if invited for a senior post, signaling that their knowledge and experience is valuable and important to the current administration, and (c) job availability and security. Factors that alumni noted as deterrents to working in government or reasons to seek employment opportunities elsewhere are (a) low pay and few opportunities for advancement; (b) lack of autonomy or few opportunities to implement ideas and new skills; (c) inability to criticize government or its policies from within; (d) low ambition from colleagues; and (e) perception that government is corrupt and inefficient, especially among Nigerians. Of course there is a significant range and multiple levels of positions in any country's government. Though the data did not indicate local government as a specific pathway for generating social change, employment in a local position could differ from a national position in the civil service. However, these workplace qualities were significant themes in understanding alumni career choices.

7. Discussion and implications

These findings contribute to knowledge of the post-graduation employment pathways of international higher education scholarship program alumni. It is worth noting that the IFP did not aim to grow capacity in government specifically. That being said, alumni from Ghana and Nigeria mostly agree that a government's efficacy, values, and competence are required for effective reform and social change in a country--especially with regard to policies and programs to support the most vulnerable citizens. Perceptions of government as *change agent* and government as *employer* both have a substantial influence on whether alumni will seek and remain in positions working for the government.

However, the idea of working for government as a way to promote social change is not a popular idea, or pathway, in Nigeria, and only somewhat more so in Ghana. It also appears to be not a common route for female alumni in either country, as our study indicated a stark gender difference between male and female alumni employed in their home country's civil service. This finding raises additional questions about barriers to women working in and staying in government employment, including being promoted to senior leadership positions. Findings show that foreign degrees do not seem to break barriers to women in government employment and reflect national gender gaps in economic participation and political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2020).

In comparison with cases from other regions of the world, the findings of this paper show that alumni in Ghana and Nigeria have similar concerns of government quality, efficiency, and transparency as those found in a comparative study of Moldova and Georgia (Campbell, 2017) and in Mongolia (Enkhtur, 2019). Similarly, alumni across studies report the importance of work

culture and conditions—including decent salary, respect for new ideas, ability to drive change and workplace autonomy—as key to choosing whether to pursue a career in civil service. By looking more closely at issues of government employment, this research also adds additional nuance to understanding the complex pathways of scholarship program alumni, and specifically, the social justice outcomes of the IFP 10-year Alumni Tracking Study (Kallick & Brown Murga, 2017; Kallick, et al., 2017; Martel, 2019).

The paper also contributes new views and extends these findings: The case of Nigeria shows how alumni pressure the government to change from *outside* the system as a way to hold governments accountable, instead of only pursuing opportunities from within the government. In fact, the majority of Nigerian alumni felt that they could have a greater influence on social change from outside government—including in positions outside the country. This view raises support for ways beyond sending remittances to “give back” to national development when living abroad. Moreover, some also noted that working for the government signaled to others that one may not be an effective or authentic social change advocate, as partnering with the government compromised one’s reputation. Findings provide further evidence about the importance of national context in understanding the individual pathways of international scholarship alumni, and the collective impact they may have on their home societies; in other words, the home country context is essential to planning, design, and evaluation of the outcomes related to international scholarships, and to a larger extent, international student mobility programs.

By bringing greater attention to how alumni perceive and participate in government employment, this study aims to inform scholarship program funders and policy makers—especially in West Africa—who hope to see large-scale national change. Specifically, these findings can help those national policymakers and organizations focused on SDG Target 4.b and charged with assessing the official development assistance (ODA) flows for international scholarships.

Moreover, the findings are also particularly significant for home country governments, especially those who fund large scholarship programs. If governments are interested and open to hiring individuals who have received foreign education, or to retain those whose international education they have funded, this paper provides advice. Namely, to attract individuals who have been educated abroad and seek to promote social justice in government, department supervisors may wish to evaluate and enhance the workplace culture, potentially increasing autonomy to implement new ideas and utilize new skills. Similarly, government human resource departments may want to revisit employee compensation packages available to individuals who are globally competitive or risk losing talent to other sectors or to emigration.

7. Conclusion

Do these findings indicate that scholarships are an ineffective tool for building capacity in national governments? Not necessarily. The aim of this study was not to determine any one program’s efficacy. Secondly, alumni interest in government employment is not static; it changes over time and with new administrations. In addition, the IFP program did not have the stated aim of government employment or government capacity development, as those types of

programs often have binding agreements to return and work for the government. In addition, we did not set out to learn about whether a foreign degree helped individuals remain in government or gain promotion. Additional research is needed to better understand scholarships for civil service capacity development and how they can be improved, especially for females.

It is also worth noting the context of the alumni's countries and programs of study during their scholarship program. The majority of alumni interviewed studied in the U.S. or western Europe, with one alumnus studying in South Africa, and many of their graduate programs were focused on sustainable development or a related field, rather than strictly studying policy. While the study was not designed to analyze these particular factors' impact on alumni's employment in government, additional research could examine how the context of the scholarship location and field of study can influence alumni's post-graduation employment within civil service.

In closing, it is worthwhile to understand how scholarship alumni perceive civil service employment as a route to social change. These findings highlight the importance of considering the specific home country context in planning, and understanding the outcomes of, international scholarship programs. This is especially true as many funders and stakeholders see government efficiency, capacity, and leadership as key to social change and sustainable development. At a time when international scholarships are being promoted as an important tool for national development, greater focus on government employment opportunities and conditions is needed for lasting institutional change and policies that support the most marginalized.

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