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SPOTLIGHT ON THE YOUNG AND SKILLED: *Exploring the potential contribution of Kenya's diasporas in the South*

The main finding of this study, on Kenyan diasporas, focused in 10 African countries, is that there is **limited formal engagement between the Government of Kenya and its members in the diaspora in Africa**. The study found that **migration figures of Kenyans in the South are often understated**. Based on the migrants' statistics held by the embassies and diaspora organizations, it may well be argued that **for every one person registered with them, there are at least six others who are not**. In this regard, the Kenyan embassies abroad need to be diaspora focused and working with diaspora associations in order to account for most of the migrants in their countries.

Kenyan **migrants to the South tend to be below fifty years of age and unmarried**. 73.3 per cent of respondents of the survey are male and 49.5 per cent are single. The majority of the respondents are between the ages of 18-29 (43%), followed by those between ages 30-39 (26%) and 40-49 (18%). Only 2 per cent of the respondents are more than 60 years of age. More than half of those married or having long term partners have Kenyan partners, followed by other African nationalities (Tanzanian, Burundian, Nigerian, Rwandese) and European. More than half of the respondents have dependents. They **tend to have an average of four dependants at home in Kenya** and mostly send money to their parents, not their spouses and children.

The respondents are also well-educated: 39 per cent possess a university (bachelor's) degree, 24 per cent have a master's degree and 17 per cent have a college/diploma certificate. A significant proportion is employed (54%). A further 22 per cent are students, while 14 per cent are self-employed. Only a small proportion of the migrants are unemployed (7%) or retired (1%). In terms of **professional expertise**, 23.3 per cent of respondents noted having experience in engineering (civil, IT, telecom) and 11.9 per cent in audit and finance.

Their main reasons for migration include the search of employment, business opportunities and the pursuit of further education (77% of the total). They acquire jobs abroad that **often utilize their skills**. In terms of average annual income, the majority (51%) earn less

than USD 20,000. Many (34%) actually earn less than USD 10,000 per annum, but this average includes most of the students. At the same time, nearly 35 per cent earn more than USD 20,000 per annum and nearly 18 per cent earn more than USD 40,000 per annum, high salaries by most African standards.

They **make frequent visits to Kenya**, at least once every two years. The **frequency of their home visits is largely determined by financial constraints or prior work commitments**. Those who regularly return to Kenya usually stay for a period that does not exceed two months. While some visit their family and friends (71.4%), others travel back for business (7.7%). They maintain contact with family and friends mainly via telephone and mobile (46%) and Internet-based communication (42%).

Eventually **most of the Kenyan diaspora respondents would want to return home for good** (67.8%). Nevertheless, financial constraints are a major impediment for those who wish to return to Kenya permanently. Those who do not wish to return home prefer to migrate to other countries in the face of dwindling prospects in their host countries. Kenyan diaspora members are also in favour of a 'skills transfer programme' for which they would visit Kenya for a period of less than a year.

The in-depth interviews found that the **vast majority of Kenyan migrants in Tanzania and South Africa have legal status**. In both countries some Kenyan migrants said they experienced **discrimination** from locals who perceive them as a threat when competing for jobs.

Diasporas members in the South own investments in Kenya (48.5% of respondents) and are interested in national development (42.1% of respondents). Many different investment sectors in Kenya appeal to the respondents, including the commercial agricultural and horticulture sector (24%), financial services (14%), manufacturing (12%), tourism (12%) and supplies (11%). Some also indicated that they would be interested in real estate (11%), transport (9%) and mining (2%). Only a few were interested in education, business consultancy

and ICT services, hotels and healthcare. They are also interested in contributing their skills or finances to development projects in education, healthcare provision, childcare and infrastructure. However, **lack of finances and political as well as legal factors in Kenya are likely to hinder their participation.**

Remittances are an indispensable source of income for their dependants in Kenya. Most migrants remit finances on a monthly basis (58.5%). Immediate and extended families are the main recipients of the remittances (67%). A significant proportion of the remittances go to parents (28%) who tend to be more trusted and needy, followed by extended family members (15%), children (12%) and spouses (12%). Another 11 per cent remit to friends in Kenya. A few also send money to religious (4%) and community organizations (4%).

Each year, migrants on average remit USD 4,045 yearly or USD 178 monthly. This money is remitted mainly through Western Union and MoneyGram. Large amounts of money are remitted through bank transfers. For those who migrate to neighbouring countries, **M-Pesa is increasingly becoming a common means of remitting money to Kenya.** For that purpose, the government needs to support efforts aimed at encouraging its usage transnationally, perhaps through introduction of incentives to the mobile service providers and by working with the various embassies in countries with large diaspora constituencies and mobile providers so as to assist in the sending of remittances.

The **recent introduction of the 10 per cent tax on mobile money transfer services may adversely affect the sending of remittances due to increased costs.** Remittances are mainly used for family upkeep, payment of school fees, healthcare provision, such as buying medicine, and to address urgent needs in the family. They are also used for personal investments and to meet the migrant's personal obligations. The **cost of sending remittances is believed to be very high and the problem is further compounded by the exchange rate conversion.**

Respondents believe that **remittances contribute positively to human development through investment in education, housing, healthcare provision and child care.** Most of the migrants do not send goods to Kenya and when they do, it is occasional or a few times a year. Household goods and appliances are the most common goods sent by migrants, followed by books and electronics.

In their host countries, **few migrants are active in various diaspora associations.** Information within these diaspora networks is shared through Internet-based communication, during meetings, through the embassy, or by word of mouth. Other than the need for consular services, the migrants do not associate themselves with the embassy. In some countries such as Tanzania, diaspora associations do not exist, so that the embassies in such countries can play an important role in facilitating the establishment of such associations. There clearly is a need for collaboration between the embassies and diaspora associations. This would provide a good avenue through which diasporas in various countries can be mobilized to take part in development, while at the same time improve the image of the embassies in those countries.

According to the results of the survey, **dual citizenship and voting rights are important avenues for diaspora engagement.** The recent efforts of the inclusion of dual citizenship in the new constitution will provide an important link between the diasporas and their home country as it conveys a sense of belonging. Most respondents of the study have retained their Kenyan nationality although a few have now acquired dual citizenship, recognized in Kenya since the enactment of the new constitution in 2010. Voting rights provide the diasporas with an opportunity to make their voices heard through the election of candidates that can best articulate their concerns.

The diaspora policy framework will need to address the issues raised in the study. In addition, there is need to **facilitate constructive debate on the diaspora within their countries,** through the Kenyan embassies working with diaspora organizations, to give them a chance to articulate their wishes before the document is finalized and implemented. Finally, there is need to pursue policies that will lead to job creation at home, so that migrants can have more options to choose from. In addition, political instability, corruption and lack of accountability discourage migrants from returning and investing in Kenya.