RWANDAN DIASPORA

Current estimates are that there are 244 million international migrants globally (or 3.3 per cent of the world’s population). It is estimated that 24.7 million international migrants are in Africa, more than 80 per cent of which migrate in search of employment.\(^1\) For decades, Rwandans have been migrating into different parts of the world for socioeconomic reasons. As a result, Rwanda has an important diaspora community in various countries across the world, with major concentrations in neighbouring countries, Western and Central Europe and North America.

Realizing the importance of the Rwandan diaspora in the national development and in the spirit of the policy of inclusion, the Government of Rwanda (GoR) strongly believes that the Rwandan diaspora is an important constituent that cannot be ignored and which, if it is well harnessed, can contribute to national socioeconomic development. Therefore, in 2009, a Rwandan diaspora policy was established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation (MINAFFET). The policy is the guiding framework which sets out how the GoR wishes to see the Rwandan diaspora contributing and being integrated into the national development of the country.

WHO IS THE RWANDAN DIASPORA?

Individuals who are migrants or descendants of migrants, and whose identity and sense of belonging, either real or symbolic, have been shaped by their migration experience and background, are often referred to collectively as diaspora.\(^2\) In the Rwandan context, Rwandan diaspora refers in general to all Rwandans who left their country voluntarily or were forced to live in other countries of the world and are willing to contribute to the development of Rwanda.\(^3\)

There is a growing recognition that diaspora facilitate and increase trade, investment and cultural linkages between the different countries that they are connected to, and therefore become important development actors. The resources of these communities that flow across borders are immensely varied and range from skills, knowledge and ideas to cultural capital, financial and trade resources.\(^4\)

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4. Ibid as footnote 2.
1. ECONOMIC CAPITAL

Economic capital is not only represented by remittances and savings, which constitute a fraction of the total private capital flow, but it also relates to direct investments made by diaspora members in business activities.\(^5\)

1.1 INVESTMENTS

The Rwandan national investment strategy (2017)\(^6\) reinforces capacity-building initiatives for entrepreneurship through support to the existing initiatives for ‘business development services’, at all levels, and thus creating a fertile ground to support the emergence of ambitious entrepreneurs. The strategy attracts foreign investors and Rwandan diaspora by establishing an attractive and favorable environment for doing business, including legal and financial reforms, tax incentives, and private sector friendly administrative procedures. In the recent years, Rwandan diaspora is credited for the construction of high standard buildings mostly in Rwandan urban centres and is linked with the recent development of the real estate market services.

1.2 REMITTANCES

According to the International Fund for Agriculture and Development\(^7\) remittances from the Rwandan diaspora contributed an estimated 2 per cent to the GDP in 2016 and grew by 34.4 per cent since 2007. These remittances are mainly used for:

- Poverty alleviation: money transfers are used by families to solve their day to day livelihood problems (health, education, welfare), as well as support the start up of micro businesses.
- Community development: Rwandan diaspora also support vulnerable communities within the country such as: One Dollar Campaign (2008-2010), No Rwandan Left Behind (2016) and participation in the One Cow Per Family (2006-2015) initiative.

These initiatives can be seen within the frameworks of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1; ‘end poverty in all its forms’ and SDG 3; ‘good health and well-being’, and meet the target of ‘be guided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ from the Global Compact for Migration (GCM).

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\(^1\) Ibid as footnote 2.
\(^3\) IFAD, Sending money home: contributing to the SDGs, one family at a time (2017).
\(^5\) KT press (2016) Diaspora Initiative To Offer Free Cattle To Poor Rwandans, KT Press, 30 September.
\(^6\) Republic of Rwanda, MINAGRI, One Cow per Poor Family Program ‘GIRINKA’ (2018).
2. HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Human and social capital may be described as the human resources that diaspora members constitute through their skills and knowledge, and the extended networks that they maintain. Skills accumulated by diaspora members are invaluable in terms of the development of a variety of sectors such as health, education and technology. Knowledge and skills transfer can be done through volunteer services (like those supported under the IOM MIDA or UNDP TOKTEN programmes), short-term consultancy services or partnerships between local and diaspora professionals’ organizations.

2.1 Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN)

The main objective of the TOKTEN programme was to reverse the ‘brain drain’ by encouraging Rwandan nationals to provide their expertise, transfer of knowhow and skills, through short-term volunteering as UN Volunteers. The TOKTEN programme was implemented from December 2005 to December 2007 through a partnership between the Government of Rwanda and UNDP. The evaluation findings indicated that the project was by and large highly successful, and achieved most of its objectives. 47 volunteers were recruited from about six countries, mainly the USA and Canada. The greatest number of volunteers had science and technology backgrounds, followed by those with agriculture, health and ICT backgrounds. Furthermore, the volunteers were highly qualified, with 21 of them having PhDs and 19 master’s degrees. They were also highly motivated by patriotism, and nine of them returned permanently to Rwanda after serving as volunteers.

2.2 Migration for development in Africa (MIDA)

MIDA is a capacity-building programme, launched since 2012, which helps to mobilize competencies acquired by African nationals abroad for the benefit of Africa’s development. Many diaspora provide their qualifications and skills in developed countries in Europe and North America. Through its mobility-based approach, MIDA aims at helping African nationals to directly contribute to the development of their countries of origin.

Despite constant progress made in the health sector, Rwanda is still affected by a shortage of qualified human resources. Therefore, IOM Rwanda, in close coordination with MINAFFET, hired two national consultants to assess the human resource gaps and needs to facilitate mapping of diaspora health professionals, and develop an outreach strategy, including suggestion on messages to be shared with them. The MIDA programme in Rwanda had the ultimate aim of contributing to the development of the health sector in Rwanda by bringing qualified Rwandan nationals back to Rwanda to engage in the transfer of knowledge and capacity building. IOM supported the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MINAFFET) and the Ministry of Health (MoH) to reach out to the Rwandan diaspora by producing posters, leaflets, web application, an interactive database, etc.

The project was able to successfully recruit and place 9 out of 15 targeted health professionals and placed them at 6 health institutions. Identifiable impact from the MIDA project including the increased quality of care of the patients in the community and the capacity-building of hospital management staff. It was also evident that the outreach strategy for recruiting health professionals was an important tool for MINAFFET to better communicate with the Rwandan community members abroad. This programme was funded by the IOM Development Fund (IDF).

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11 Ibid as footnote 2.
12 K.S. Touray, Final evaluation of the support project to the implementation of the Rwanda TOKTEN volunteer program (2008).
14 IOM, Enhancing the capacities of Rwanda’s public health sector through linkages with diaspora health professionals (2013).
This exercise aims to provide an insight into the diasporas’ socioeconomic profiles, professional skills and expertise, and will assess their capacity, interests and motivation to participate in the development process of their country of origin, Rwanda. The exercise will also promote evidence-based policymaking and support the mainstreaming of diaspora priorities into the development policymaking process in the country.

The mapping exercise will be followed by awareness-raising campaigns by the Rwandan embassies in each country to inform the diaspora on the available opportunities for future engagement, in terms of investments, remittances, skills and knowledge transfer, especially in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

The project will result in an informative diaspora mapping report for each participating country and will provide practical recommendations on how to develop a methodology for data collection, analysis, sharing and determination. Based on the findings and recommendations from the assessment of, a training workshop on migration management will be conducted by IOM Rwanda for Rwandan Government officials, policy makers and implementers.

The report with comprehensive data about the profiles of Rwandans living in Belgium, UK, Netherlands and Germany can be considered as a useful evidence base for the formulation of future policies and programmes on diaspora engagement in Rwanda.

“Knowing and understanding transnational communities is crucial to engaging them effectively, and developing the appropriate outreach strategies towards diaspora communities. That is why IOM regularly maps and surveys diaspora communities,”

Director General IOM, William L. Swing

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