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NIGERIAN DIASPORAS IN THE SOUTH: *Harnessing the potential for national development*

This study on Nigerian diasporas in the South demonstrates that **there are abundant skills, knowledge and financial, social and cultural remittances transferable by Nigerian diasporas in the 'South'** waiting to be harnessed for the purposes of human development in their home country. However, harnessing these resources requires that individual and group economic potential is unlocked, and that the barriers and challenges to maximizing diaspora contributions are promptly removed.

The sample used in the study was **dominated by those in the 40-49 age group** (72.6%), followed by those between 18-29 (19.1%) years of age and between 30-39 (3.7%) years old. Only a small number (4.6%) were over 50 years of age. **Eighty per cent of the respondents were married and the majority have Nigerian spouses;** nine per cent have Ghanaian spouses and six per cent South African spouses. In terms of gender, 91.5 per cent of the respondents were male while only 8.5 per cent were female.

The key finding of the study is that **the Nigerian diaspora profile in South Africa and Ghana is similar to that of Nigerians in Europe and North America** in terms of migration push and pull factors, remittance behaviour, identification with 'home', aspirations and desire to succeed, and return to Nigeria. There is also specific individual and group willingness to participate in contributing to human development in Nigeria.

More than **76 per cent of interviewed diaspora members have university bachelors and masters degrees** all of whom have skills both to drive positive changes and aggregate growth and human development in the home country. More than 67 per cent of those with these qualifications were either private investors or self-employed taking advantages of the opportunities lacking in the home country. Self-employment is common among the Nigerian diaspora but is more important in South Africa (59%) than Ghana (53.6%).

Entrepreneurship (51%) and investment (18%) were cited as the main occupations in both Ghana and South Africa. About 23 per cent of respondents were employed. There were some few graduate students engaged in part time income generating jobs. USD 24,583 and USD 26,000 represents the annual household income of the basic professionals in paid employment in Ghana and South Africa respectively. However, the average annual household of the **Nigerian entrepreneurial professional diasporas** is USD 65,238 in Ghana and USD 63,600 in South Africa, indicating that this group have higher disposable incomes which may affect the potential of playing a role in contributing to human development in Nigeria.

In terms of the **reasons for leaving Nigeria**, 72.7 per cent moved because of economic factors such as the search for employment or business opportunities, 19.1 per cent cited education as the main reason, five point five per cent moved because of marriage while two point seven per cent moved with the spouse.

Most Nigerian diasporans expect their stay in host countries to be temporary but very few were not sure about the estimated time for their permanent return. Respondents cited corruption, lack of opportunities, poor political, economic and social governance, unemployment, insecurity, and health related issues as barriers over the decision to return on a permanent basis. No respondent planned to relocate to another country.

Most Nigerian diasporas in Ghana and in South Africa **connect to Nigeria by receiving and sharing information on events in the home country mostly through the telephone and internet based means of communications**. About 15 per cent use letters and oral means of information exchange at the meetings of their home town associations.

Diaspora members often **visit the country at least once a year** especially during the festive period. As many

as 44 per cent visit Nigeria mostly to reconnect and socialize with their families and friends while 25 per cent visit for holiday and pleasure purposes. Only 21 per cent visit for business or investment purposes and this was predictably higher among the Nigerian diaspora in Ghana (23.2%) than South Africa (18.5%).

Most of the remittances sent to Nigeria were primarily for the **survival of family members**. The **main recipients** of the remittances are parents (39.4%), children/dependants/siblings (15.7%) and extended family members (14.6%). Only 10 per cent of remitted cash goes to community organizations. Only 23.9 per cent are regular remitters sending money on a monthly basis. The same proportion remit on a quarterly or annual basis while the majority (56.8 %) only send remittances **‘when the need arises’**. The use of remittances varied widely but other most common ones include education (32.6%), housing development (31.5%) and health provision (30.3%).

About **27 per cent of respondents remitted money for personal investments, private property development and for meeting personal obligations**. Different academic qualifications and job placements account for income and remittances levels for the two categories of professionals sampled. The average annual remittance of Nigerian diaspora is USD 2,880.82. This drops down to USD 2,400 if the median amount sent is considered. In South Africa, an annual estimate of more than USD 3,300 remittance is recorded compared with an annual estimate of USD 2,470 from Ghana.

Informal channels were used mainly by respondents. The majority of respondents wish to send cash in a speedy and efficient way but are hampered by problematic processes and prohibitive transaction costs.

Besides sending remittances in the form of cash, the Nigerian diaspora in Ghana and South Africa also send remittances in kind. These include household goods, clothing and appliances (95%), educational materials (52%); equipment including cars (48%) and others like jewellery, perfumes, tourists’ collections, chocolates, children toys and so on (36%).

In terms of **investment and human development**, more than **96 per cent of respondents admitted to have acquired assets for private investment in Nigeria**. Another **92 per cent have indicated interest at initiating**

personal investments in private property development - primarily in education, housing and health and provision of social amenities, hotel and tourism, banking and financial services.

A **100 per cent of respondents show interest in contributing to political, economic and administrative governance in Nigeria if allowed**. Due to the limited opportunity for participation in human development activities in Nigeria, only a few are able to transfer their skills. More than 43 per cent of respondents at different times identified skills transfer and knowledge transfer as the type of support they will offer to development projects in Nigeria. Respondents however, identified unfavourable political/economic/social environment, internal resentment by public institutions and absence of trade/diaspora policies, legislation and formal procedures on how to manage investments in Nigeria while in foreign countries as major barriers to investment growth that can motivate them to contributing to development in Nigeria.

More than half of the respondents have **strong feelings of ‘belonging’ to their homeland and participate in the activities of home town associations** and the national diaspora unions of their country in the host communities. Some belong to two or more diasporas’ networks than they do for their work based networks. Most Nigerian diaspora members wish their **embassies would take more interest in the individual and associations’ welfare** than the renewals of travel documents. They desire the embassies provide more information and assistance relating to settlement in the host countries and generating information on investment and employment opportunities in Nigeria. Finally, they expect more diplomatic involvement in seeking appropriate redress for the violation of their rights in the host communities.