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Language and livelihoods in Johannesburg: Cameroonians income generating strategies

Katende, Kalambay

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates how language affects the livelihoods of migrants and their use of social networks for income generation in Johannesburg. The study focuses on the Cameroonians, a community constituted by two main linguistic groups: Francophones and Anglophones. It explores the historic process of migration into the Republic of South Africa, the motivations behind the choice of the inner city of Johannesburg by Cameroonians, and it differentiates the type of social networks in which Cameroonians in this study engage in. The research report also explores how language shapes social networks among Cameroonians living in the inner city of Johannesburg.

Findings of this study reveal that language does not have a direct effect on livelihoods as almost all Cameroonians migrants interviewed in this study are able to speak both English and French. It nevertheless, shapes the respondents' opportunities and strategies as many rely on linguistic communities to access information, get social assistance, and find jobs. This study found that Cameroonians living in the inner city of Johannesburg use intra-linguistic social networks more than inter-linguistic group social networks for their income generating strategies. It also demonstrates the importance that language has in the lives of these respondents.

The study is based on non-representative sample of Cameroonians living in Johannesburg. It used a multi-methods approach including in-depth face-to-face interviews and written sources such as journals, books and research reports were combined to gather relevant data. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data.