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“Development on the margin”

This Is Just a Place to Work – Understanding Life among Migrants at Lake Naivasha

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Abstract

Lake Naivasha is a main destination for labour migration in Kenya. The massive cut flower and horticultural industry sustained by the fresh water lake as well as the geothermal power plant and the business opportunities in the region promise jobs for people from all over the country. As a result, the settlements around the lake have been growing for the past forty years, yet few people decide to settle there ultimately.

In the public, the perception of the flower industry is ambivalent. On the one hand, it is of great importance for the Kenyan export sector and therefore believed to bring economic development to the country. The “Western” consumers also believe to help the development of social standards in the industry through buying fair-trade-certified flowers. On the other hand, the working conditions on the plantations and the living conditions in Naivasha are often criticised in the media as well as in academic and NGO-publications.

The work in and life around the flower farms are, beyond this bigger discussion, a reality for the people in Naivasha. My research aims at understanding how the workers and other residents make sense of their life and work in a place which is not their home. Which expectations do they have and which goals do they want to achieve in their lives? Why do they decide to come to Naivasha and even stay for many years, regardless of the unfavourable conditions? How do they perceive and interpret their actual situation and cope with the difficulties they face?

Keywords: Flower industry, lake Naivasha, migration, understanding of life