

At a glance: the Indian and Chinese diaspora in Tanzania

According to the latest available data on Tanzania there were 60 000 Indians in 2015 and 30 000 Chinese in 2013. The small size of the diasporas gives an impression that it plays no particular role in the social life of the country, especially the Chinese one (there is zero information on any notable Tanzanian of Chinese descent).

The Indian diaspora is more rooted in Tanzania in terms of history and culture. Among the community's prominent personalities are Mohammed Dewji – one of Africa's youngest billionaires according to Forbes; Rakesh Rajani – a civil society leader; Ally Rehmtullah - a fashion designer. In some ways, Africans and Indians have similar mentalities, so Indian popular culture is easily embraced by Africans. However, Chinese restaurants are as popular as Indian ones, and Chinese TV-dramas have been on the rise lately. Moreover, there has been an increase in interest in learning Chinese. Both the Chinese authorities and the local Chinese diaspora leave power and politics to the Africans. The same is true for the Indians.

Therefore, the diaspora acts as a publicity vehicle for their country of origin by creating a positive image that makes India and China more attractive, better known, easy to understand and do business with. However, it's naïve to question the influence of the diaspora. There's no power, but there's influence. India and China have been Tanzania's main business partners for years, China can boast numerous construction projects (among them - TAZARA railway), India invests into ports infrastructure and maritime sector. Although many diaspora groups have no links to the government, politicians use the rhetoric of foreign involvement in the Tanzanian economy to portray it as good or bad, depending on their objectives.