

Young and educated Ugandans are most likely to consider emigration

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 307 | Derick Msafiri and Ronald Makanga

Summary

Migration has marked Uganda as a country of destination and transit as well as of origin. Responding to political violence, economic problems, and humanitarian crises both within its borders and in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and other neighbouring countries, migrants and refugees have traveled to, through, and out of Uganda in large numbers over the years. As of April 2018, estimates of refugees living in Uganda stood at about 1.4 million – more than any other African country. While data are sketchy, a 2013 estimate placed the number of Ugandans living abroad at about 629,000 but noted that the diaspora could be as large as 3 million (International Organization for Migration, 2015, 2018a, 2018b).

With one of the world's youngest and fastest-growing populations and high unemployment, providing education and job opportunities is a persistent challenge (Among & Munavu, 2019). Out-migration has had a particularly negative impact on the health sector, which has lost many trained professionals looking for better employment opportunities in Rwanda, South Africa, or elsewhere (World Bank, 2016; New Vision, 2018).

According to the most recent Afrobarometer survey in Uganda, about one-third of Ugandans have considered emigration to other countries, although far fewer are actually making plans to leave. Young and educated citizens are among the most likely to consider moving abroad. Among potential emigrants, the largest number say they would move to another country within the East African region, generally in search of economic opportunity.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public-attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 countries between 1999 and 2015, and the results of Round 7 surveys (2016/2018) are currently being disseminated. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative sample.

The Afrobarometer team in Uganda, led by Hatchile Consult Ltd, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Ugandans between 26 December 2016 and 8 January 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Uganda in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, and 2015.

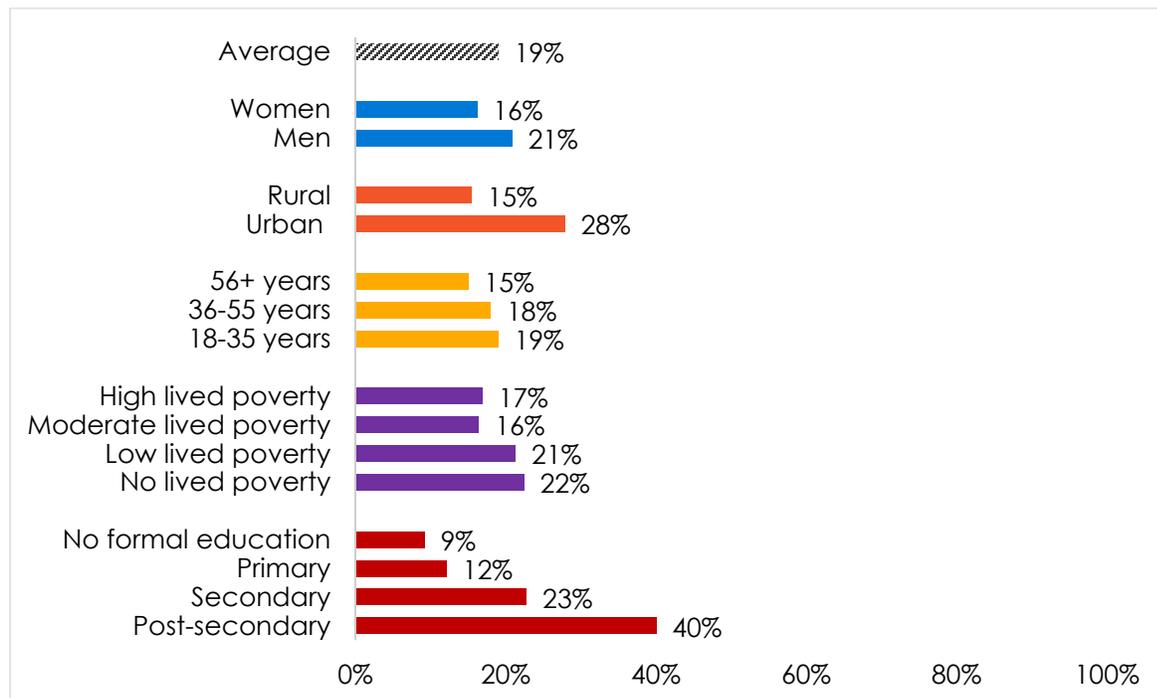
Key findings

- One-third (34%) of Ugandans say they have considered moving to another country to live, including 11% who have given this “a lot” of thought.
- Potential emigrants are particularly common among citizens with post-secondary education (52%), urban residents (50%, including 61% in Kampala), and young respondents (40% of those aged 18-35).
- Among respondents who have considered emigration:
 - About one in 12 (8%) say they are making preparations to leave, such as getting a visa. Most others say they are not yet taking specific steps but plan to move in the next year or two (22%) or are not making plans to leave (70%).
 - Three out of 10 (30%) say they would move to another country in East Africa, while 23% would prefer to go to North America.
 - Most say they are motivated by a desire for economic opportunity: to find work (50%), to escape poverty (20%), or to pursue better business prospects (9%).

Living abroad and crossing borders

A substantial number of Ugandans have already lived in other countries or have relatives who have lived abroad. One in five respondents (19%) say that during the three years preceding the Afrobarometer survey, they or their family members have gone to live outside Uganda for at least three months (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Lived outside the country | by socio-demographic group | Uganda | 2017

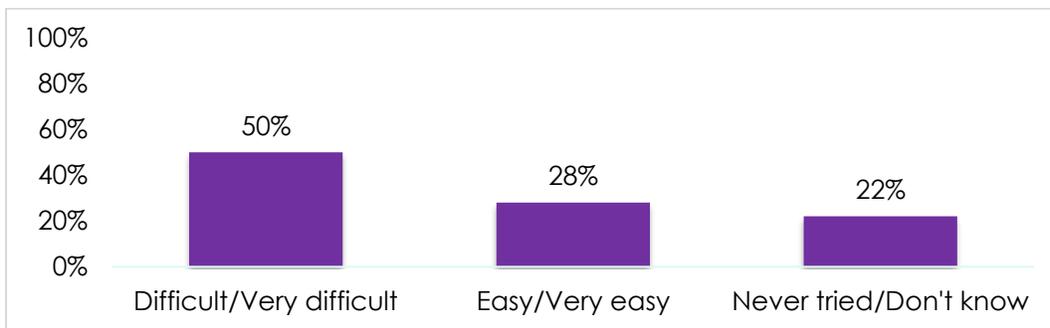


Respondents were asked: During the past three years, have you or anyone in your household gone to live in another country outside Uganda for more than three months? (% who say “yes”)

Urban residents (28%) and men (21%) are more likely to have lived abroad than rural dwellers (15%) and women (16%). Living in another country is also more common among better-educated and economically better-off¹ citizens. Respondents with post-secondary education (40%) are about four times as likely as those with primary schooling (12%) or no formal education (9%) to have lived abroad.

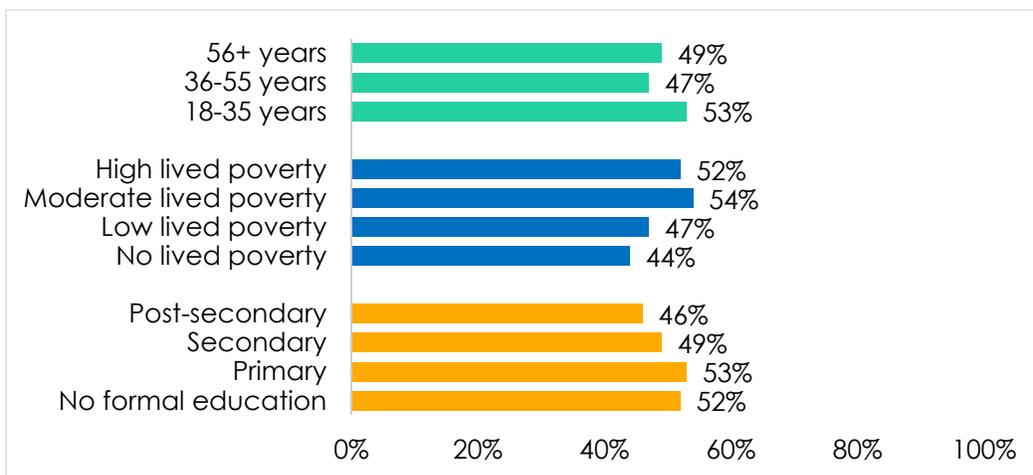
But half (50%) of Ugandans say it is “difficult” or “very difficult” for people in East Africa to cross international borders in order to work or trade in other countries, while only 28% describe it as “easy” or “very easy” (Figure 2). Young, less-educated, and poor citizens are somewhat more likely to report difficulty crossing borders than those who are older, more educated, and economically better off (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Difficult to cross borders | Uganda | 2017



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how easy or difficult is it for people in East Africa to cross international borders in order to work or trade in other countries, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Figure 3: Difficult to cross borders | by socio-demographic group | Uganda | 2017



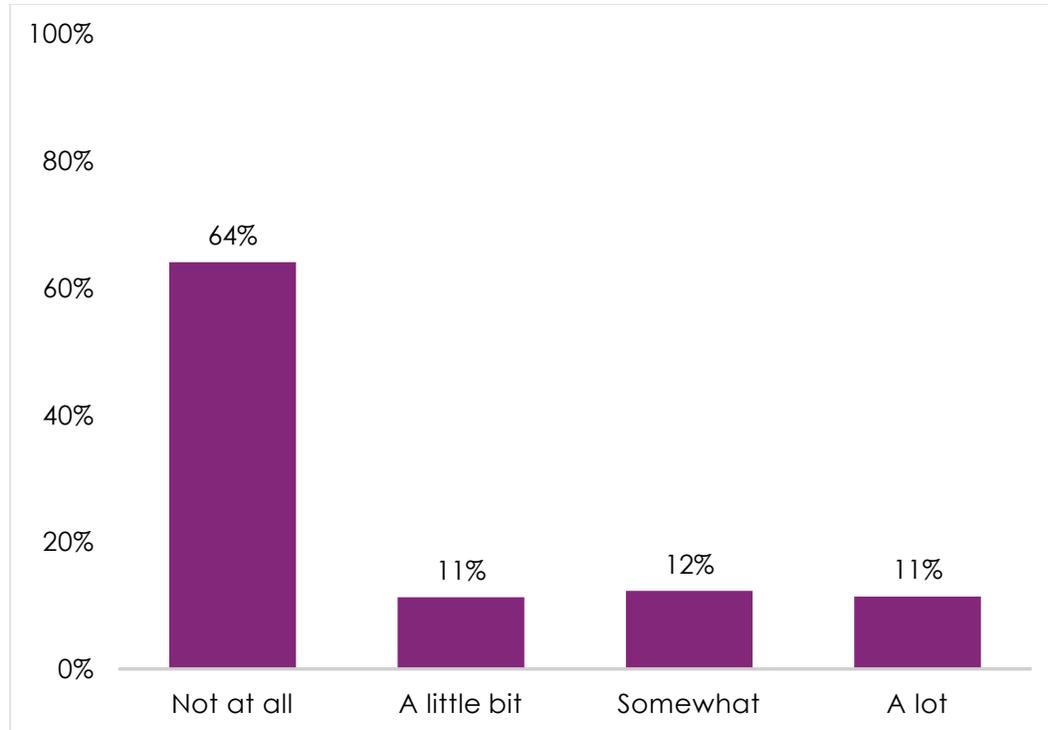
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how easy or difficult is it for people in [East] Africa to cross international borders in order to work or trade in other countries, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say “difficult” or “very difficult”)

¹ Afrobarometer assesses respondents’ “lived poverty” based on responses to the following questions: “Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?”

Desire to emigrate

One-third of Ugandans (34%) say they have considered moving to another country to live, including 11% who have considered it “a lot.” About two-thirds (64%) say they have “not at all” considered emigration (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Considered emigration | Uganda | 2017



Respondents were asked: *How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live?*

The inclination to consider emigration varies considerably by age, education, and other factors (Figure 5). It declines with age, from 40% among respondents aged 18-35 to 17% among those aged 56 or older. The best-educated citizens are nearly four times as likely to consider moving

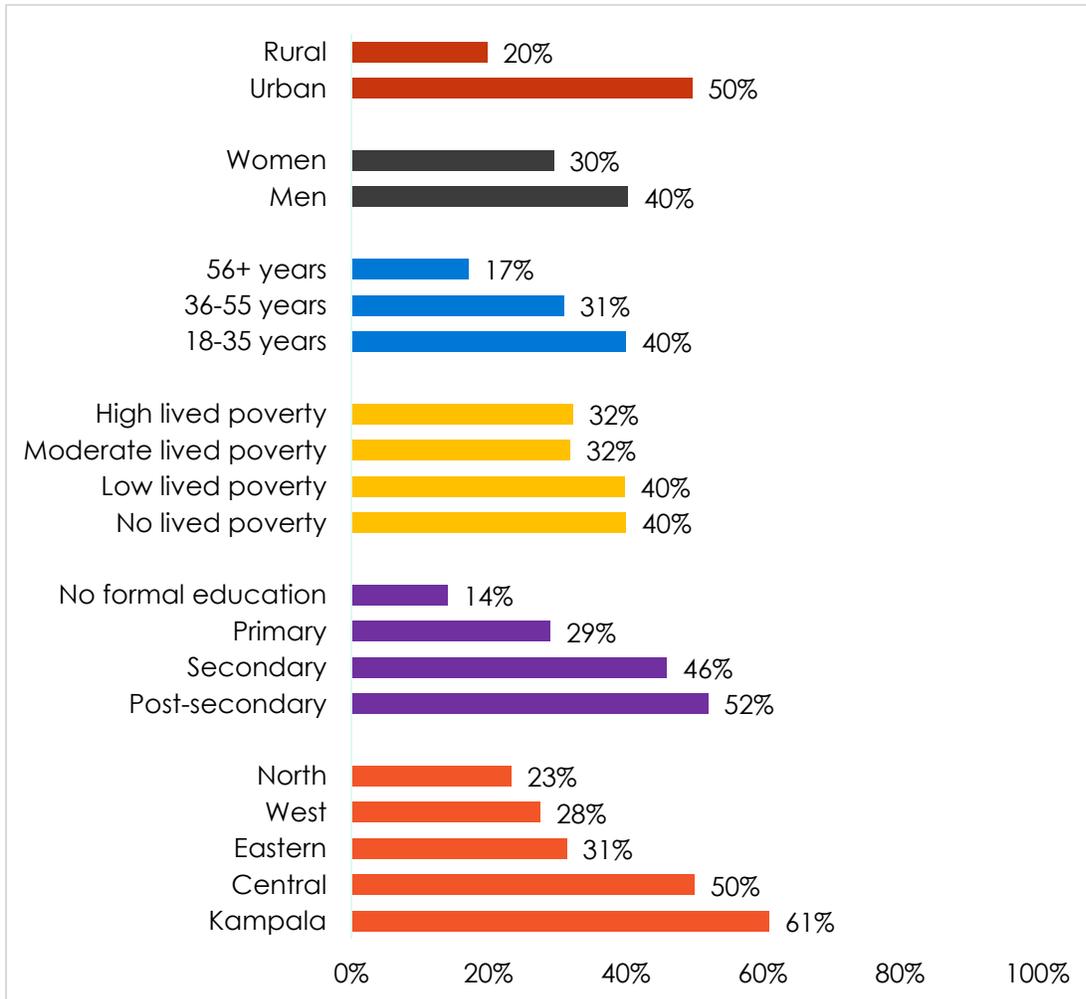
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abroad (52%) as are their counterparts with no formal education (14%). The gap is smaller – 8 percentage points – between poorer and better-off respondents.

Urban residents are more than twice as likely as rural dwellers to consider emigration (50% vs. 20%). In line with this difference, fully 61% of Kampala residents say they have thought of leaving their country, followed by 50% of

residents in the Central region, compared to fewer than one-third in Eastern (31%), West (28%), and North (23%) regions.

Figure 5: Considered emigration | by socio-demographic group | Uganda | 2017

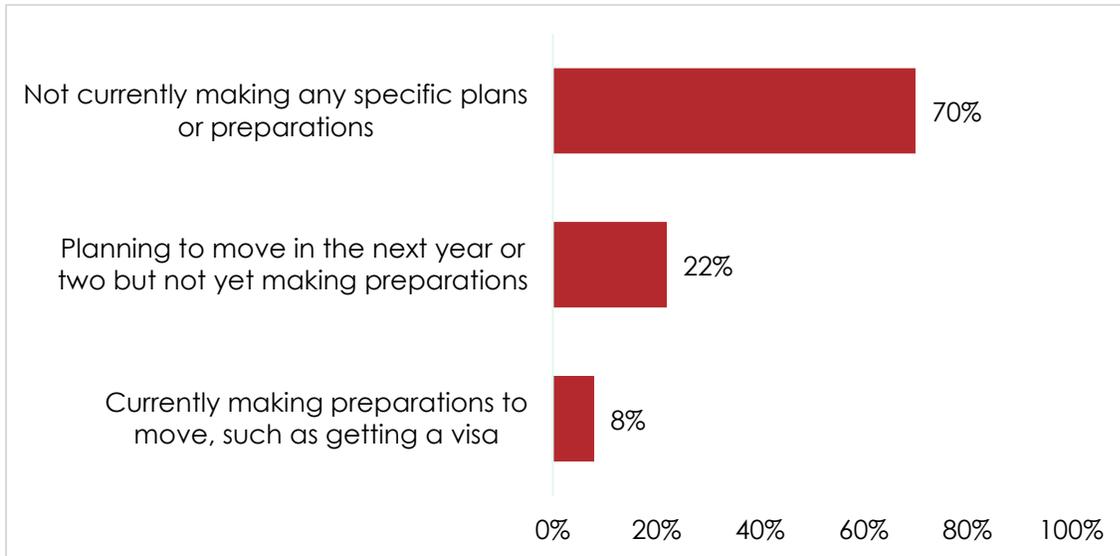


Respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live? (% who say “a little,” “somewhat,” or “a lot”)

Making preparations

Among potential emigrants (those who say they have considered emigration at least “a little bit”), about one in 12 (8%) say they are actually making preparations to move, such as getting a visa. A majority (70%) say they are not currently making plans, while about one in five (22%) say they are planning to move in the next year or two but not yet making specific preparations (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Making plans to leave | Uganda | 2017

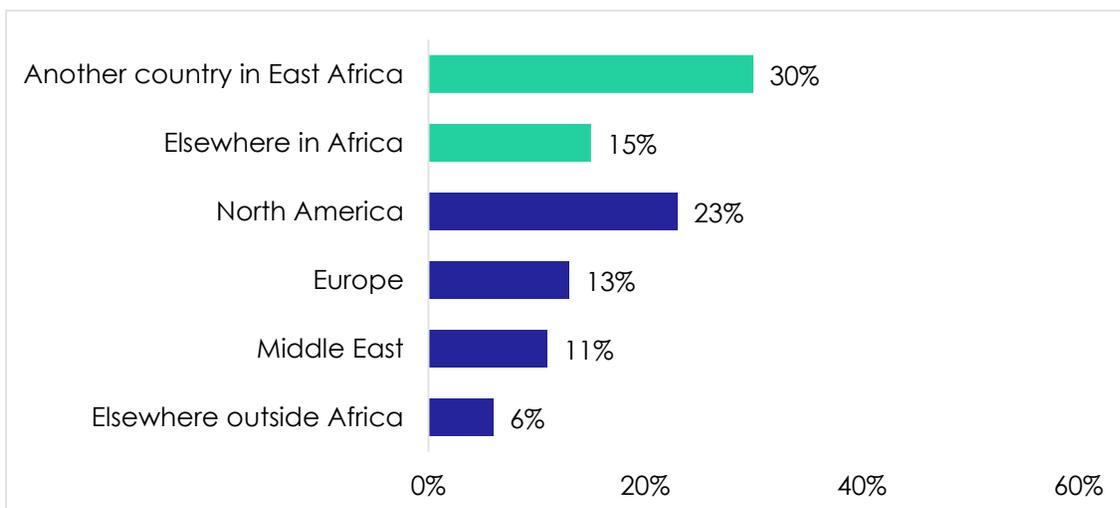


Respondents who said they had considered emigrating were asked: How much planning or preparation have you done in order to move to another country to live? (Analysis excludes those who said they had not considered emigrating.)

Preferred destinations

Among Ugandans who have considered emigration, the largest number would move to another country within East Africa (30%, including 6% who would head for Rwanda). Another 15% would go elsewhere on the continent. The most popular destination outside Africa is North America (23%), followed by Europe (13%) and the Middle East (11%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Preferred destination | Uganda | 2017

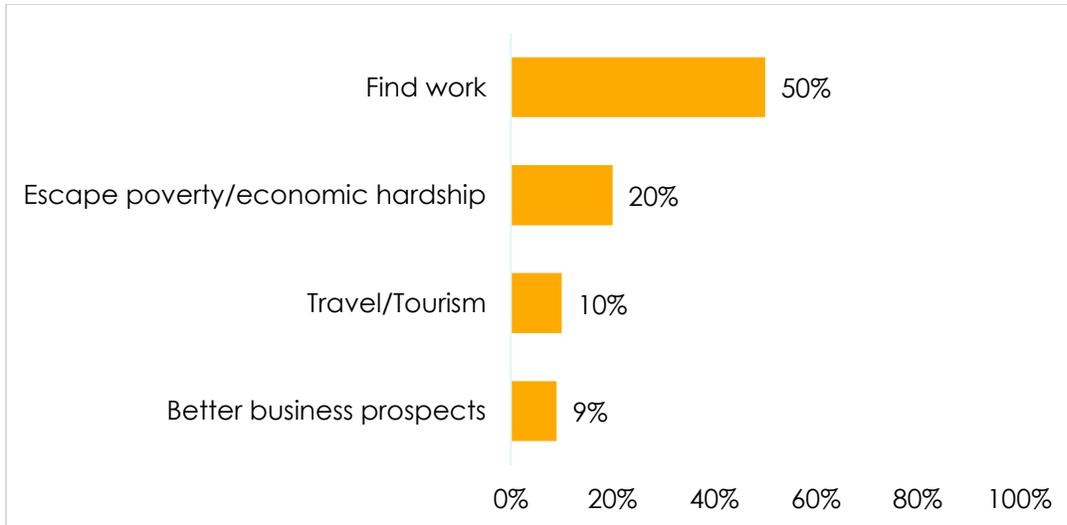


Respondents who said they had considered emigrating were asked: If you were to move to another country, where would you be most likely to go? (Analysis excludes those who said they had not considered emigrating.)

Main motivation

Eight out of 10 potential emigrants cite economic reasons for considering leaving their country: to find work (50%), escape poverty or economic hardship (20%), or find better business prospects (9%). One out of 10 (10%) are motivated by a desire for travel or tourism (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Most important reason for emigration | Uganda | 2017



Respondents who said they had considered emigrating were asked: What is the most important reason why you would consider moving from Uganda? (Analysis excludes those who said they had not considered emigrating.)

Conclusion

One in three Ugandans have considered moving to another country, generally in pursuit of economic opportunity they don't have at home. The number of potential emigrants is especially high among youth and the best-educated citizens, putting Uganda at risk of losing some of its most energetic and skilled human resources. The government thus faces the challenge of providing job opportunities that will make staying home an attractive option.

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, directs a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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