

Somali Diasporas' contribution to relief & development

(No 6 in a series of essays addressing current issues in Somalia)

Since the Somali Civil War started in 1991, following the overthrowing of the Siad Barre Government, the country descended into anarchy as clan-based warlords competed with each other and left the country with no one controlling the security, no law and order and a political vacuum throughout the nation. Then Somaliland declared independence in 1991, followed by Puntland in 1998. They both managed to establish a degree of peace and security. Throughout all this turmoil, the Somali diaspora has continued to make a major contribution to the Somali economy and livelihoods through remittances, humanitarian assistance and participation in recovery and reconstruction efforts. The diaspora's development efforts are currently focused in rebuilding the Somali nation in parallel with efforts by the UN, UNDP and other international agencies.

The diasporas have played a significant role because their members are British or European Citizens, American or Australians, all accountable and responsible individuals living in UK / Europe, and rest of the world. "Meanwhile we were doing something remarkable. As fast as we take citizenship in the UK and in other European countries, we continue to support by sending remittances to our family's villages, valleys, and communities", one diaspora member said. For the last twenty-one years, the diaspora has been the largest donor for aid to Somalia.

The humanitarian situation in Somalia is very acute, particularly in the south. Of a population of just 9 million, 2.5 million people need food aid, 1.5 million people are displaced inside Somalia and three quarters of a million Somalis are registered as refugees in neighbouring countries. From a population of 9 million, that really is a country in crisis, although ironically-or not ironically-one of the more stable areas of the country is where piracy is found.

What Is Missing

Recognition of worldwide Somali diasporas' contribution

Largest aid contributor since 1991

Good links with all regions of Somalia

A united sense of togetherness

Poor international coordination

There are many International conferences and meetings on the future of Somalia, all seeking to strengthen security and to redouble joint efforts, politically and militarily, to fight piracy, human trafficking, smuggling, illegal fishing and the dumping of toxic waste. However, unfortunately over these years, there has been one voice that has not been heard. That of the Diasporas and their contribution. We have ourselves to blame. Too often we have exported the animosity of the country we love to the country we have learned to call home. An effort by the international community to sound out our opinion has led to differing narratives and unclear messages.

Independent analysts assess our Diasporas contribution last year to top \$1billion. It's in fact far more than the combined contribution of bilateral and multilateral aid. So we have been working in parallel but no sufficiently valued or officially recognised.

How we are going to get out of the Crisis

Generation of diasporas born outside Somalia

New capacity to coordinate programmes

Traditional links with Somalia remain strong

Increase in acceptance of gender issues

The Diaspora community to play a pivotal role to peace building/development in Somalia

Progress of World G18 Somalia

Somali Joint Statement

Creation of working groups

- Gender

- Business mentoring

- Environment

- Piracy

- Youth

Use of our family links with coastal communities

Our pilot process to reward villages rejecting piracy

To identify the right people who can heal the wounds

Over the last two years, we Diasporas in the UK have managed to come together, unite into a representative group, the World G18 Somalia. Why 18? Because there are 18 regions in Somalia. By our title, we acknowledge the equal claim of all in Somalia to a voice being heard. The Diasporas can play a significant role, because they are British, or European Citizens and accountable and responsible individuals live in UK/ Europe. They can play role as a Somali with knowledge of what is going on in Somalia.

World G18 Somalia will work with other partners such as informed agents (Triton, Cohorts LLP) and we will engage elders, civic leaders in order to win the hearts and mind of the community to implement pilot projects. Because we know far better than people who are not used to our customary judicial practices (Xeer). The mechanisms of approach should be wise and able to win the heart and minds of the native communities in the coastal towns and villages. Most of us believe this has been resulted by long-term neglected crisis. As a result of that, piracy has become a global problem but one that needs a local solution. We strongly believe that World G18 Somalia can provide leadership here.

Peace Building

In conflict and peace building, the diaspora is a double-edged sword, contributing significantly to both. Financial obligations to support the clan in times of conflict have endured; this has been unhelpful. Yet diaspora intervention in support of local reconciliation and state building has been a key ingredient for success, notably in Somaliland, Puntland. And recently in South-Central Somalia.

World G18 diasporas are intending to promote understanding and dialogue in areas of conflict. Through negotiations with elders and cultural based clan negotiations at community based grassroots level, through putting in place, environmentally sustainable development that could proactively address potential security threats before they evolve

into conflicts. We strongly believe that the WG18S is a culturally appropriate organisation, and bridge between the Horn of Africa and the world. That it can implement timely and innovative solutions on the land in Somalia using our sense of belongingness, influence, connections with local people, the knowledge and awareness of Somali culture.

Since 2000, the Diaspora has been highly visible in the state institutions of Somalia, including Somaliland and Puntland, occupying top leadership positions of the state, political parties, cabinet, parliament and civil service. Some question the prominent role of the Diaspora in Somali politics.

Economic Development

The Somali Diaspora makes its most sustained and direct contribution to development and service delivery by establishing and supporting local institutions in the home region, district or village. Long-term, systematic support typically involves paying salaries for teachers and health workers and support for orphanages. The scale of this activity is hard to quantify because it involves hundreds (probably thousands) of small fund-raising networks operating across the globe. It appears that the practice of supporting facilities in the home area within Somalia is becoming part of the traditional culture of obligation towards those who are left behind.

The Somali Diaspora is the major investor in the country and provided 80% of the start-up capital for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and for for-profit activities which contribute to economic recovery and improving livelihoods. Returnees establish businesses individually or as a group and pool resources or manage business at the executive level. Investment is spread over various sub-sectors such as small scale industries, telecommunication, remittances and trade.

Somali Diaspora members contribute to development through their work for international development agencies. Returnees contribute their skills and technical know-how, where they teach in the local universities and provide technical support to government departments. The UNDP Qualified Expatriate Somali Technical Support (QUESTS) project has helped to promote this activity in areas of stability. Overall, the activities of the diaspora in the political and economic spheres tend to be mutually supportive of each other and are resulting in an ever-strengthening diaspora network that plays an increasingly significant part in the life of the country.

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