



Somali Diaspora Groups in Sweden Engagement in Development and Relief Work in the Horn of Africa

Diaspora groups – migrants, refugees and their descendants – have emerged as important development actors in countries affected by protracted conflict and poverty. Their assistance ranges from remittances to disaster relief and development projects, providing a lifeline in crisis and contributing to long-term processes of change. This Delmi-report illustrates diaspora engagement in development and relief work through the case of the Somali diaspora in Sweden.

A multitude of diaspora actors and development activities

The most prevalent Somali-Swedish diaspora actors that support development in the Somali region are registered associations and based in Sweden. Other actors include individual initiatives, mosques, businesses, women's associations, NGOs, and umbrella organizations as well as informal diasporic networks with members in several continents. These actors are

involved in a wide range of development activities, as outlined in Table 1. There are two institutionalized diaspora support programmes in Sweden: the Somalia Diaspora Programme (SDP) that offers matched funding for Somali-Swedish diaspora associations and the Swedish-Somali Business Programme (SSBP) that supports social entrepreneurship. The official development assistance comes from Sida but the diaspora programme is administered by the civil society platform, Forum Syd.

Table 1: Somali-Swedish engagement in development and relief

Focus	Activities	Funding
Health	Build/renovate hospitals, clinics Pay salaries Send used equipment Capacity-building and awareness	Association member fees/donations Diasporic fundraising Public and private donors (Forum Syd – SDP funding)
Education	Build/renovate schools Pay salaries Send used equipment Capacity-building and awareness	Association member fees/donations Diasporic fundraising Public and private donors (Forum Syd – SDP funding)
Drought relief	Provision and transport of water Donations to drought committees Drill boreholes Crisis mapping	Fundraising in mosques, at social events, via social media and through diasporic networks Association member fees/donations Public and private donors
Sustainable development	Environment protection Job creation and skills training Capacity-building and awareness	Forum Syd – SDP and SSBP funding Association member fees/ donations Public and private donors
Gender equality	Capacity-building and initiatives on: Reproductive health and FGM Women and girls’ rights	Forum Syd – SDP funding Association member fees/donations Public and private donors
Human rights and democracy	Capacity-building and initiatives on: Democracy and good governance Civil society development Peace and conflict resolution Youth and minority rights	Forum Syd – SDP funding Association member fees/donations Public and private donors

Policy recommendations

In order to strengthen the development potential of diaspora engagement, and based on the data gathered, the report offers the following recommendations for policy- and grant-makers:

Acknowledge the diversity and scope of diaspora engagement in development

Somali-Swedish diaspora engagement is characterized by diversity and flexibility, reflecting a strong civil

society engagement in the Somali region. It is important to note that contributions to development projects do not replace individual remittances or donations for drought relief. This testifies the scope and flexibility of involvement of some diaspora actors who are active at three levels: as entrepreneurs who organize projects, as capacity developers engaged in knowledge transfer, and as sources and conveyors of resources. The engagement reflects the underlying motivations for involvement: a sense of moral obligation and urgency, embedded in social and economic support networks

and Islamic charity practices. Professional and political ambitions may also play a motivating role.

It is an overall recommendation to acknowledge the diverse Somali-Swedish contributions to development and relief, whether these activities receive external funding or not. This means that one-size-fits-all models should be avoided. Likewise, it is relevant to recognize that development contributions may go hand in hand with other obligations and priorities, such as family responsibilities in Sweden or the Somali region.

Intensify policy consultation and dialogue

Somalia is a significant partner country for the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), being the fourth biggest recipient of foreign aid in 2016. The fact that both SIDA and diaspora groups are engaged in the Somali region indicates potential mutual opportunities and interests. This implies that Sweden may have a strategic interest in cultivating a strong relationship with Somali diaspora groups to further development but also in relation to other priorities. Initiatives like the SDP and SSBP are one way of doing this. Nevertheless, many diaspora actors find that the dialogue between policymakers and diaspora groups is insufficient and express a desire for stronger inclusion in policy processes that concern the Somali region and diaspora engagement. Intensifying policy consultation can strengthen partnerships, taking into consideration that collaboration offers potential opportunities for development agencies and diaspora actors alike.

Enhance flexibility and simplify administrative procedures

Diaspora activities do not necessarily coincide with the modalities and sectoral divisions in SIDA or other development agencies. This causes skepticism among some development professionals concerning the effectiveness and compatibility of diaspora activities with development cooperation. Conversely, some diaspora actors question the appropriateness of Swedish development priorities and a rights-based approach in contexts of abject poverty and post-conflict.

Furthermore, the extensive application, accounting and reporting processes involved in especially SDP projects are considered a widespread challenge among diaspora actors, given that most diaspora associations are run by volunteers. Introducing enhanced flexibility vis-à-vis reconstruction activities and service delivery as well as faster and simpler administrative procedures would facilitate involvement in diaspora support programmes and would have wide resonance among diaspora actors and in the Somali region.

Consider transnational connections and mobility a strength

Institutionalized support to diaspora involvement is based on the premise that diaspora actors are simultaneously connected to an erstwhile home area, as well as to their country of settlement, mastering language and cultural codes in both contexts. Close connections with and frequent visits to the country of origin strengthen the development potential of diaspora

engagement as diaspora actors remain updated on the situation and needs in the area. Supporting knowledge transfer conducted by diaspora professionals is one way of enhancing this, for instance through (partial) coverage of salaries in case of long-term capacity development. However, it is important that diaspora professionals do not take over local jobs.

Another recommendation is to emphasize the importance of local language proficiency and contextual knowledge when hiring in development agencies or organizations.

Finally, the often-held perception that development actors should be neutral regarding the areas they operate in may not be convenient in all cases. Diaspora contributions to development projects often go hand in hand with other obligations and priorities, such as family responsibilities, religious practices and personal ambitions. Simultaneous engagement does not necessarily jeopardize contributions to development

projects but may motivate and sustain them. However, it is important that institutionalized diaspora support remains need-based and does not exacerbate inequality.

Reach out to new actors and support innovative technological solutions

Finally, much diaspora engagement today takes place through registered associations and it is based on voluntary work and a sense of moral obligation. However, many diaspora actors emphasize that when the current generations withdraw and retire the future of such involvement will be uncertain. Reaching out to other actors, such as individual entrepreneurs and businesspersons is, therefore, important when considering the future of institutionalized diaspora support to development. In the same way, assistance to other types of activities should be considered, including innovative technological solutions and deliberation on how – and if – more ad hoc and network-based diaspora activities can and should be included.



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