



Institute for Security Studies

# SITUATION REPORT

## THE SOMALI DIASPORA

### Options for post-conflict reconstruction

With the transition process having come to an end and a semblance of normality returning to Somalia, the priority remains how to stabilise the country and promote national reconstruction. For a country that suffers from multifaceted security challenges and lacking basic functioning institutions, the effort to rebuild livelihoods is not going to be easy and will require support. Importantly, this support will have to come from Somalis themselves.

A group that is expected to play a crucial role in Somalia's reconstruction process is the 14 per cent of the country's population who live outside their homeland.<sup>1</sup> Broadly, the diaspora is defined as a group or groups of people who are dispersed from their homeland, for example refugees, or who leave their homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions.

Over the past two decades, the Somali diaspora have contributed significantly to Somalia's economy. Remittance flows were estimated at up to US\$1 billion in 2004, but could be as high as US\$1,6 billion to Somalia and US\$700 million to Somaliland, thus making financial remittances a mainstay of the country's economy.<sup>2</sup> It is revealing that for a country that has had no nationally acceptable central government for over two decades, in 2010 Somalia was ranked 160 out of 227 countries by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in terms of gross domestic product (GDP), with a GDP of US\$5,896 billion.<sup>3</sup>

While the Somali diaspora are broadly classified according to age, time of migration, level of education, skills and reason for leaving, they are generally resourceful and have in the past played an important role in peacebuilding processes, although there have also been claims that they were supporting and joining armed rebel groups, thereby contributing to the protracted civil war and instability.

The case of Somalis in diaspora in Kenya<sup>4</sup> is particularly instructive. Kenya is host to about 1,5 million legal and illegal Somali migrants in addition to over 500 000 Somali refugees at the Dadaab refugee camps.<sup>5</sup> The Somalis in Kenya are involved in trade networks worth millions of US dollars and are expected to play an important socio-economic and political role in their country's reconstruction should stability be consolidated.

This situation report, based on a combination of desktop research and fieldwork, examines the current and potential role of the Somali diaspora in general, and in Kenya in particular, in rebuilding their country. It will do so by assessing the challenges and opportunities for Somalis in the diaspora in Kenya in participating in their country's reconstruction. The report's emphasis on Kenya is based not only on the size of the Somali diaspora in Kenya but also on the proximity of the two countries. The report argues that the competencies of Somalis in diaspora in Kenya could, if well harnessed, play a meaningful role in Somalia's reconstruction.

## THE ROLE OF SOMALIA'S DIASPORA IN CONTEXT

Since its inception in February 2004, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG),<sup>6</sup> which led Somalia through the transition process that ended on 20 August 2012, has been accused of a top-down approach that lacked consultation with ordinary Somalis and Somali civil society. In the recent past, however, the former President and Prime Minister attempted to address this by often meeting with the Somali diaspora community on their official visits to other countries. This was under the aegis of collecting ideas on how the government could help the diaspora to contribute technically and politically towards the rebuilding of Somalia.<sup>7</sup>

Overall, a number of cases demonstrate the attempts by the Somali diaspora to engage with their homeland. The Arta Process of 2000 opened the door to the diaspora from Puntland and the southern regions together with civic actors to assert themselves in Somalia's national politics.<sup>8</sup> The diaspora became highly visible in the top leadership of the country with the first Prime Minister of the Transitional National Government (TNG), which was established in 2000, being a diaspora politician, as were several Members of Parliament (MPs) and Cabinet. The diaspora became a driving force among the civic actors in Somalia's politics and this steered the politics away from the domination of armed groups.<sup>9</sup> Most of these leaders from the diaspora often enjoyed the support of the international community, leading to questions about their legitimacy as they were seen as being proxies of certain international actors.<sup>10</sup>

The recent past has witnessed an increased attempt by the Somali diaspora to influence the political direction of their country. In June 2011, for instance, the Somali diaspora in the United States, Europe, Kenya and Uganda staged demonstrations supporting then Prime Minister Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed's position on the Kampala Accord.<sup>11</sup> Abdullahi initially refused to step down as per the recommendations of the accord. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni mediated the accord, which established the end of the transition process and ensured that the political stalemate between the then President and Speaker of Parliament was resolved.<sup>12</sup> Abdullahi, who had been brought in by President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, enjoyed the support of Parliament while Speaker Sharif Hassan felt that the Cabinet was largely drawn up without his input.<sup>13</sup> Eventually the Prime Minister resigned, with Somalis in the diaspora complaining about the role of Uganda in their country's politics.

The Somali diaspora again played a prominent role at the Istanbul II Conference held from 31 May to 1 June 2012 to discuss the ending of the political transition. This conference pursued a multi-dimensional and multi-layered approach that, besides involving the Somali diaspora, also

brought together women, youth, the business community, elders and religious leaders.

During the recent selection of MPs in August 2012, and the election of the President on 10 September 2012, a number of candidates from the diaspora contested the presidential seat while some were selected as MPs. This demonstrates not only the extent to which the new Somali government will need to devise ways to involve its sizeable diaspora but also the potential for this group to play a much more constructive role in rebuilding their country.

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Although the rebuilding process has been slow, especially in establishing a political solution to the once lawless Somalia, there has been progress, backed by the United Nations (UN) and other partners. After many failed peace attempts, on 5 October 2012 the newly elected President, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, appointed Abdi Farah Shirdon as the new Prime Minister of Somalia, an indication that political reconstruction is well on its way. Militarily, on 28 September 2012, the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) together with Somali government forces took control of Kismayo town, which was al-Shabaab's last stronghold in Somalia – an indication that rebuilding peace and security in Somalia is work in progress.

## CONTEXTUALISING SOMALI EMIGRATIONS AND HOMELAND ENGAGEMENT

Migration across borders has been at the heart of the nomadic lifestyle of Somalis for centuries. Somalis have long been crossing borders to graze their livestock, to trade, or to work. By the 1960s many Somali men were employed in the transport sector in East Africa and today they remain an integral part of the East African transport sector.<sup>14</sup>

Beyond the East African region, Somalis were, even before the instability caused by the fall of the Siad Barre regime, labour migrants in the US, Europe and Gulf states. The eruption of the civil war in 1988, however, resulted in the major movement of Somalis from their country to

neighbouring states such as Kenya. The fall of Siad Barre in 1991 was followed by the largest mass flight of Somalis to date, with Kenya receiving a large number of the refugees. This resulted in the establishment of the Dadaab refugee camps. After 1991, the main causes of displacement in Somalia were civil war, drought and political repression.<sup>15</sup> One positive consequence of this trend of migration has been the increase in financial remittances, which, as in many African countries, have been the mainstay of the country's economy.

## Not all of the diaspora had relinquished their tribal or clan-based interests

But the Somali diaspora, while inextricably linked to their homeland, have played a mixed role politically. With the exception of Somaliland the Somali diaspora did not initially get an enthusiastic reception in political processes related to their country.

The limited role of the Somali diaspora in the affairs of their country can be explained in various ways.

- In the 1990s, the political elite who served under Siad Barre or were long-term opposition figures – such as Abdullahi Yusuf and Somaliland's first president, Mohamed Egal, or warlords such as General Mohamed Farrah Aidid – were quite dominant. They drew the almost exclusive attention of both their clans and the international community and paid little or no attention to the diaspora.<sup>16</sup>
- During the early 1990s, most of the Somali diaspora were mainly preoccupied with establishing themselves economically in their foreign bases rather than seeking to influence processes in their homeland.
- Additionally, many did not have travel documents or enough money to pay for participation in processes back home. Significantly, too, the status of the Somali diaspora in the 1990s was quite different from that of today: they were at first seen as individuals who would send money home and not as actors who could set agendas for peace and the political process.<sup>17</sup>
- With the exception of Somaliland, in the 1990s the political environment of Somalia was dominated by warlords and clan militias, who controlled most of Somalia, and most members of the Somali diaspora did not want to associate themselves with the brutal warlords and clan militia rule.<sup>18</sup>
- There were no incentives for meaningful political participation by the diaspora. Somali diaspora holding non-Somali passports had to pay the same

fee for their entry and exit visas as non-Somalis.

Even those who had no reason to participate in the political process found themselves struggling against government practices and policies, which restricted their participation.<sup>19</sup> This has changed in the recent past with various political authorities, including the TFG, Somaliland, Puntland and local traditional authorities, benefiting from diaspora support.<sup>20</sup>

Somali refugees face different challenges when it comes to political participation, however. Historically, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has had an uncomfortable relationship with refugees who engage in political activities, viewing refugees who demand a participatory role in politics as troublesome.<sup>21</sup>

Another major difficulty the Somali diaspora have in engaging politically with their home country is their heterogeneous nature, which is often stratified along class, education, occupation, cultural interests and urban and rural backgrounds.<sup>22</sup> This diversity has sometimes resulted in competing forms of engagement that, rather than complementing each other, end up being antagonistic and detrimental since they serve competing selfish interests. Indeed, clans and political divisions make it difficult for the diaspora to become meaningful players.<sup>23</sup> In February 2012, when Chatham House hosted a consultation between members of the UK-based Somali diaspora and British government officials to discuss the political transition, security and role of the self-declared independent Somali regions of Somaliland and Puntland in the peace process, the participants noted that the Somali diaspora were greatly involved in supporting their country but cautioned that not all of the diaspora had relinquished their tribal or clan-based interests.<sup>24</sup> Another issue that arose from the meeting was that some of the Somalis probably did not follow closely developments in their country and therefore lacked sufficient knowledge about it.<sup>25</sup> Other members of the diaspora were perceived as opportunistic as they donated funds to faction leaders and militia groups in order to buy themselves favours in the hope that they might obtain positions in a future Somali government when the faction leader that they support becomes president or a minister.<sup>26</sup>

On 1 May 2012, the UN and its partners issued a warning against 'spoilers' in the Somali peace process.<sup>27</sup> A major concern, especially among the diaspora, is that they may be branded spoilers, thus preventing constructive criticism and political engagement in the reconstruction process.

Most studies on the diaspora's engagement with their homeland reveal mixed feelings, especially in the area of politics. Three explanations are given, especially for the negative perceptions.

- Most diaspora leaders are viewed as not having shown any real leadership or direction to their country but rather as promoting divisive agendas reminiscent of Somali politics.<sup>28</sup>
- There are strong sentiments about the diaspora being out of touch with the situation in Somalia.
- The fact that most members of the diaspora can return to their host country when they fail to make an impact or when things go wrong has contributed to negative perceptions about their intended role in Somali politics.

## PLACE OF REMITTANCES

The ushering in of the era of financial remittances has played a major role in the diaspora's engagement with their homeland. During the period 2006–2007 when the Islamic Courts Union (ICU)<sup>29</sup> controlled most parts of Somalia, remittances were sent in particular to fund the ICU, which to many Somalis appeared more acceptable after it had freed Mogadishu from secular warlords. While some criticised this diaspora support to the ICU, the diaspora believed that their support was to secure lasting peace.<sup>30</sup> In addition, it has been argued that support for the ICU and subsequently to other militias has demonstrated more of an anti-Ethiopian and a pro-nationalistic sentiment than direct support for the militia groups.<sup>31</sup>

Support for conflict actors is not a new phenomenon in Somalia with the diaspora taking a keen interest in supporting one group over another. In the early mid-1990s, during a flare-up in armed conflict, the diaspora contributed funds to purchase ammunition, weapons and technical vehicles.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, some of the remittances sent to Somalia sometimes ended up with armed groups without the knowledge of the sender. This has often been because of the size of unmonitored remittances sent by the Somali diaspora.

By the late 1990s, the diaspora became increasingly reluctant to fund militias, viewing them as part of the problem.<sup>33</sup> However, this was not the case in Somaliland, especially during Siad Barre's regime, when the Somaliland diaspora provided funding, medicine and general support to the Somali National Movement (SNM), which was established in London in 1981.<sup>34</sup> Overall, diaspora remittances have played a considerable role in sustaining Somalia's informal economy, but as a result of Somalia's insecure set-up for over two decades now, these remittances have contributed to bequeathing the country a protracted civil war.

## SOMALI DIASPORA IN KENYA

The Somali diaspora in Kenya have for some time now been involved in various initiatives aimed at rebuilding the economy and establishing peace and governance in

Somalia. These initiatives can be broadly categorised into the three key sectors discussed below.

### Economic contribution

In Nairobi's eastern suburb of Eastleigh there is a large Somali presence that can be traced to refugees fleeing the civil war in Somalia in the early 1990s. Though initially the Somali refugees settled in makeshift camps in northern Kenya, after some time they resettled in Eastleigh, a centre that has brought numerous business opportunities to the Somalis in Kenya.<sup>35</sup> Somali businessmen active in transport, real estate, finance, import-export and livestock have invested over US\$1.5 billion in Eastleigh, transforming the area into a business hub.<sup>36</sup> Eastleigh is probably the second most important Somali diaspora business centre in the world after Dubai. Some Somali businessmen own hotels, shopping malls and large properties in Eastleigh and often also run international enterprises. While most Somali refugees come to Eastleigh without any substantial belongings, in time they achieve remarkable success and become a source of assistance to their relatives in Somalia and other countries.<sup>37</sup>

As refugees in Kenya, Somalis are often unable to get jobs in the formal sector. Somalis in Eastleigh mainly engage in informal economic activities that in some instances do not require paying taxes. Somalis from the business community in Eastleigh claim they support local schools back home and charities through the annual *saka* payment and periodical supplementary payments.<sup>38</sup> Recently, Kenyan banks began to take cognizance of this group's potential and started establishing banks that follow Muslim banking practices.

### Political participation

The Somali diaspora in Nairobi have, for some time now, participated in various peace negotiations. In April 2000, for instance, members and representatives of the Somali community living in Kenya gave their support to the government of Puntland for its withdrawal of support to the Djibouti conference, citing mistrust arising from the 'mishandling' of the peace process and the exclusion, suppression and marginalisation of mainstream Somali communities.<sup>39</sup> In 2003/04 the Somali community in Nairobi used their expertise in enhancing the articulation and negotiating capacities of local protagonists.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, most peace conferences held in Kenya are usually attended by the Somali diaspora living in Kenya. They have also participated in lobbying through official letters sent to peacemaking stakeholders, which are often signed by members of the Somali community in solidarity. Political lobbying is also seen when the Somali diaspora in Kenya receive their leaders at the airport and attend closed-door

meetings held in Nairobi. A clear indication of the power of lobbying was when the Somali community in East Africa managed to influence the TFG to retain the current ambassador of Somalia to Kenya, Mohamed Ali Nur, when pressure had mounted for him to be withdrawn.

The political Somali elites living in Nairobi are keen observers of and participants in governance in Somalia. There are reports of self-styled Somali leaders based in Eastleigh hotels who claim to be in charge of certain regions of Somalia that are dangerous for them to govern

## Many Somali politicians have used Nairobi as a logistical hub for their activities

physically.<sup>41</sup> There has, however, been controversy surrounding the presence of these leaders in Kenya. In January 2010 the government of Kenya warned then MPs from Somalia against using Nairobi as a safe haven to organise chaos in their own country. At one time there were an estimated 100 Somali MPs in Kenya.<sup>42</sup> On one occasion the Kenyan police arrested several Somali MPs in a roundup of people suspected of taking part in a riot in Nairobi. Among those detained and later released were 12 Somali MPs and several government officials. The government of Somalia protested to Kenya over the arrests.<sup>43</sup>

Many Somali politicians have used Nairobi as a logistical hub for their activities. In May 2011, for instance, hundreds of Somali MPs and other leaders attended the launch of businessman Haji Mohamed Yassin's presidential campaign at the Laico Regency Hotel in Nairobi. Yassin said it was unfortunate that he was launching the campaign outside Somalia due to insecurity in his own country.<sup>44</sup> He noted that Nairobi was a host to many Somali MPs, politicians, businessmen and members of the international community who work in Somalia. Another Somali presidential hopeful, Abdurahman Abdullahi, popularly known as Baadiyow, also launched his presidential campaign in Nairobi on 17 June 2012. Some Somali political organisations have branches in Nairobi, for example the Tayo Somalia political party headquartered in Mogadishu.

A sizeable number of Somali academics are also based in Kenya. Even the TFG itself operated for some time from Nairobi. Most organisations working in Somalia, including the UN Political Office for Somalia, have operated from Nairobi. Owing to the prominence of Somali issues in Nairobi in the recent past, some Somalis called upon the

TFG and other actors to 'de-nairobi' Somali issues. The motivation to operate from or launch parties in Nairobi has largely been because of its proximity to Somalia, the large population of Somalis in Kenya, and the importance of Nairobi as a media centre.<sup>45</sup>

## SOMALI WOMEN IN NAIROBI

Somali women have not been left behind in terms of political participation. Asha Haji Elmi, a co-founder of Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC), which has its headquarters in Mogadishu and a branch in Nairobi, is a peace activist for Somalia and has been living in Nairobi since 2006.<sup>46</sup> Recently, Asha was picked by the traditional elders to become an MP for the government of Somalia. Asha has been involved in fighting for the rights of women through SSWC, which advocates for a safe and sustainable Somalia by supporting women to overcome marginalisation, violence and poverty in their communities. During the Arta peace talks in 2000, Asha together with other women founded the 'Sixth Clan' to complement the traditional five Somali clans, which are all male-dominated. This was the first time women were represented in a peace process in Somalia. She played a similar role in the Mbagathi Conference in Nairobi (2002–2004), which gave birth to the Transitional Federal Government and the Transitional Federal Parliament, of which Asha became a member.<sup>47</sup> As one of the 25 women MPs elected during the Arta peace talks, Asha is happy that this number has been increasing. In a country governed by Sharia law, Asha and her fellow women activists have made tremendous achievements. These include elevating women to the negotiation table with Sixth Clan and as equal partners in decision-making processes, a 12 per cent quota for female representation in the Transitional Federal Parliament, the introduction of fair gender formatting ('he/'she') in the charter language, the creation of a Ministry for Gender and Family Affairs, and a decree by former Prime Minister Dr Abdiweli Ali to ensure a 30 per cent quota for women in district and regional councils, in national commissions, in local committees and at conferences.<sup>48</sup> Although these achievements sound good on paper, Asha is quick to point out that implementation will not be easy. Using the same strategy as during the peace talks, Asha and the other women have lobbied by often meeting with policymakers such as the former President and the Prime Minister to discuss the implementation of women quotas. With an array of strong networks inside and outside Somalia, the women activists in Somalia and in the diaspora use this as a mechanism to lobby for their demands. These networks are not taken for granted, as their continued existence is uncertain due to security concerns in Mogadishu. According to Asha, the diaspora needs to grasp the numerous opportunities inside and outside Somalia to be a part of the political process in

their country.<sup>49</sup> In addition to garnering the quotas, Asha has received numerous awards, including the Clinton Global Citizen Award in 2009 and the Lifetime Africa Achievement Prize for African Peace in 2010.<sup>50</sup>

The efforts of the Somali women have borne fruit, with the current government of Somalia having 13,8 per cent women representatives. This is similar to that of Djibouti and considerably higher than Kenya's paltry 9,8 per cent.<sup>51</sup>

## SOMALI YOUTH IN NAIROBI

The youth makes up the greater part of the Somali diaspora in Kenya. Farhan Mohamed, a Somali youth who came to Kenya in 1998, where he studied, is now the chairperson for Youth United for Social Mobilisation (YUSOM) and is actively involved in the political process in Somalia.<sup>52</sup> YUSOM is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation, free from political, clan, religious and ethnic divisions, which works with thousands of youths in Eastleigh, north-eastern Kenya and throughout the south-central regions of Somalia. He is dismayed that the first draft constitution did not mention the rights of the youth in Somalia. YUSOM is empowering the youth in sports and also holds peace forums. In February 2012, YUSOM organised a seminar on the ills of piracy to advise youth against piracy, given that many young men see it as a lucrative way of getting money. Speakers included Galmudug administration Minister of Fisheries Hassan Said Samatar, TFG and Puntland MPs, women activists, prominent Muslim clerics and scholars. Through YUSOM, Farhan was invited to the East Africa Youth Forum 2012 in Asmara, Ethiopia, where he lobbied for the inclusion of the youth in the draft constitution-making process. He has also been talking with the Minister for Youth in Somalia to lobby for the inclusion of youth issues in the constitution. In the provisional constitution, which was adopted on 1 August 2012, the word 'youth' has been included, showing that some of the pressure from YUSOM may have made an impact, although the rights of the youth are still not mentioned. Article 52 of the adopted constitution mentions the youth issue as a concern that affects the various territories of Somalia and that the issue needs to be discussed by the presidents of the federal member states and high-ranking officials in their regular meetings, among other issues.<sup>53</sup>

In July 2011 a Kenyan Somali youth founded the Eastleighwood Youth Group, a non-profit organisation that brands itself as having no political, religious or ethnic affiliation and is focused on empowering the hundreds of thousands of youths in urban and rural areas throughout south-central Somalia, and in Eastleigh and north-eastern Kenya.<sup>54</sup> The TFG recognised this group's efforts in preaching peace and sent them a recognition letter.<sup>55</sup> The group has also enabled Somali youths who do not have jobs to become involved in 'acting for peace' instead of

engaging in criminal activities. The organisation convened a colourful celebration of the International Day of Peace in Eastleigh on 21 September 2011. The guests of honour included the chairman of the independent committee for the Draft Constitution of the Somali Republic and the members of the parliamentary select committee for federal and constitutional affairs of Somalia. At that meeting the need for constitutionalism was clear if there was ever to be peace in Somalia.<sup>56</sup> Eastleighwood has managed to open a branch in Mogadishu due to the improvement in the security situation in Somalia.

Broadly, the activities of the Somali youth in Kenya are impressive, with more than 30 Somali youth groups in Nairobi merging to form a united front for peace, a move that Somalia's Defence Minister, Hussein Arab Isse, called a 'victory' for young people. Isse spoke to the youth delegates when the merger was announced, encouraging them to reject tribalism and work towards a national peace, the UN-funded Radio Bar-Kulan reported on 2 April 2012.<sup>57</sup>

## SOMALI REFUGEES IN KENYA

Refugee participation in politics is complex, even in open democratic states. A new report by the Danish Refugee Council shows that Somalis account for 85 per cent of refugees in Kenya.<sup>58</sup> The report notes that Kenya hosts over 600 000 refugees (see diagram 1) with 52 000 of these, mainly Somalis, living in Nairobi and its environs. Over 500 000 refugees live in Dadaab and 90 000 in Kakuma. Most refugees in the camps claim that they have no legal right to be involved in the politics of their country.<sup>59</sup> During the Mbagathi Conference of 2002–2004, hundreds of Somali refugees in Kenya demonstrated outside the venue calling for the formation of a new government.<sup>60</sup> It was not clear whether these were camp or urban refugees and who had ferried them there. Although most refugees in the camps are preoccupied with daily survival amid dire humanitarian conditions, they are not completely disconnected from what is happening in Somalia as they often follow news on radio and also communicate with relatives back home. These refugees are also linked with relatives elsewhere in the diaspora and the money transfer service *Hawala*<sup>61</sup> does very well in Dadaab, with refugees receiving money from and sending money to relatives back home. A 2010 study commissioned by the Kenyan, Danish and Norwegian governments showed that the Dadaab camps bring about US\$14 million into the surrounding community each year.<sup>62</sup>

## Sociocultural engagement

This is the engagement of ideas, values and norms and information that diaspora actors who have gained particular experiences, knowledge and skills from abroad bring to their homeland.<sup>63</sup> Social media is largely used by Somalis

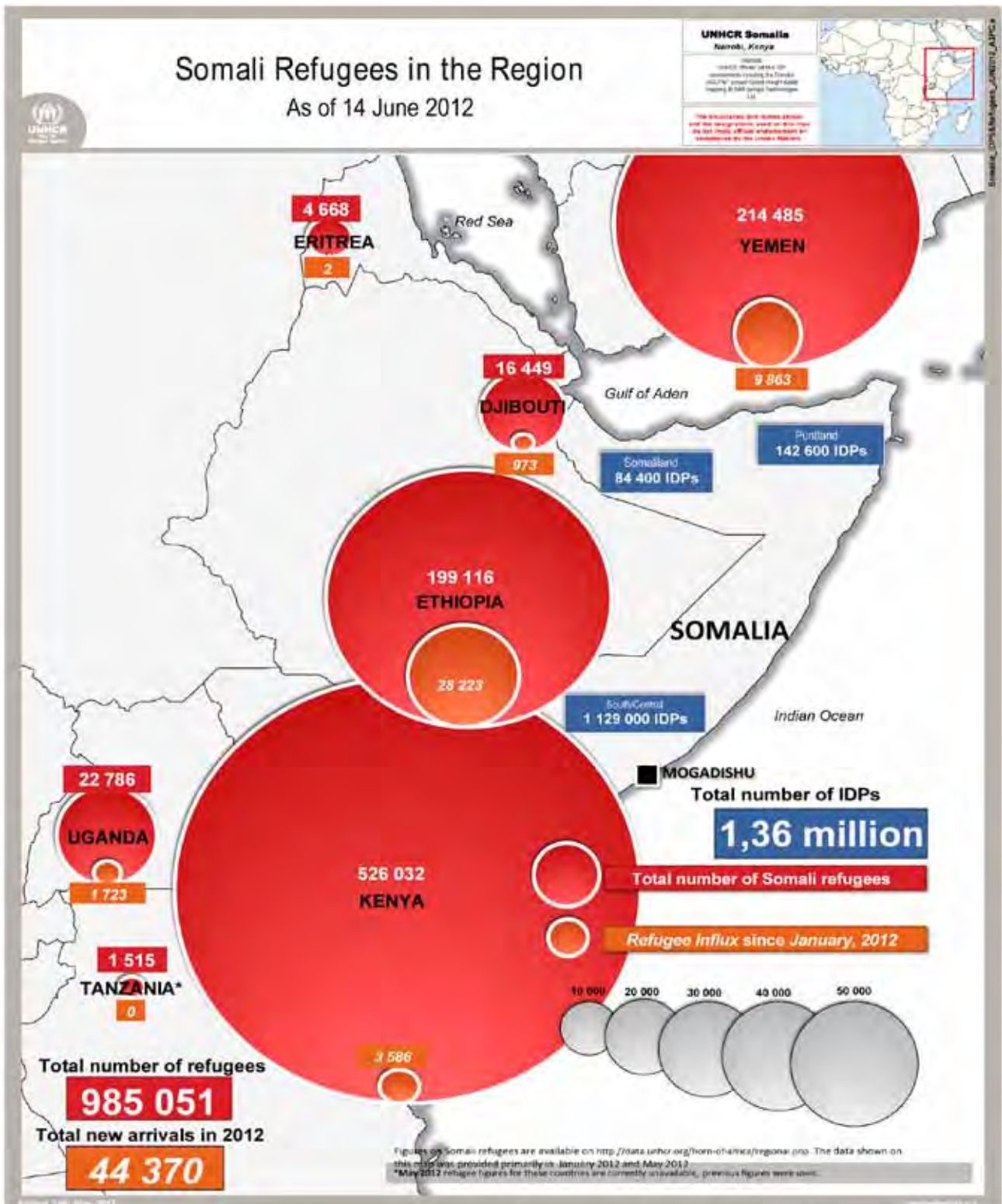


Diagram 1 Somali refugees in the region as of 14 June 2012.

Source: UNHCR

in Kenya and elsewhere to inform, educate, advocate and lobby both state actors and international actors with the aim of raising international awareness on political issues. Somalis in Eastleigh have access to the Internet through cyber cafés where they keep track of the political process. A Kenyan Somali radio presenter at Star FM in Eastleigh, which broadcasts in Nairobi, parts of north-eastern Kenya and Mogadishu, says that Somalis who engage in forums on its website discuss, among other issues, the constitution and corruption in Somalia during the transition process.<sup>64</sup> According to the presenter, the Somalis wanted the international community to undertake an independent audit on the accountability of donor funds and take action against the TFG. The debate on the airwaves mainly revolved around the exclusion of most Somalis from the draft constitution-making process by the TFG. What was evident from interviews with Somalis was that they were more interested in peace before discussing politics. Some of the Dadaab refugees also participate in radio discussions about their home country. While some Somalis were optimistic about the end of transition and the election of a legitimate government, others were sceptical, thinking that then President Sheikh Sharif, Prime Minister Abdiweli Ali and Speaker of Parliament Sheikh Hassan would influence the picking of MPs and ensure that one of them remains in power. This was something they thought would damage the credibility of the process, resulting in resentment of the new government by the majority of Somali people.<sup>65</sup> After the election of the president on 10 September 2012, the Somali diaspora in Eastleigh celebrated with many indicating their satisfaction with the process and with the president elected.

Among the Somali groups in Kenya spreading the message of peace and reconciliation is Waayaha Cusub (New Era), a Somali hip-hop band based in Nairobi, Kenya. Akhyaar Abdulahi Ali, known as Shiine Akhyaar, is the founding member of the band. Born in Mogadishu 29 years ago, Shiine immigrated to Kenya with his parents in 1997 to escape the escalating violence in his homeland. Currently, the band has been singing to fight the extremism advocated by groups such as al-Shabaab. As a result of this, he and another member of the group have been attacked several times, but he says this has only made him more resilient in his message of peace and has won him supporters both in Somalia and internationally.<sup>66</sup> In addition, Somali artists held an exhibition in Nairobi with one of the attractions being a drawing of a happy, proud man (probably a member of the TFG) with a potbelly saluting a \$100-bill flag rather than the Somali flag behind him. Mukhtar Bashir Mudey, a Somali refugee artist living in Kenya, pointed out that it was not safe to be an artist in Somalia due to extremist groups like al-Shabaab saying that art is a sin. He now makes a living from his art in the refugee camp and has been featured in an international Somali Cartoon Exhibition in Nairobi.<sup>67</sup>

The Somali diaspora has established several professional associations in order to provide professional and technical services to all of Somalia, with some organisations providing consultancy services. The Somali Agricultural Technical Group (SATG) is one such organisation that was formed prior to the collapse of the Somali state and is registered in the US, Canada and Kenya as a non-governmental agricultural organisation with some members of SATG being part of the diaspora.<sup>68</sup>

## CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY THE KENYAN SOMALI DIASPORA

Despite the above initiatives, the Somali diaspora in Kenya are aware of the untapped opportunities and challenges they encounter when engaging in Somalia. The following challenges were observed.

### Divisive clan politics

Not all of the diaspora have relinquished tribal or clan-based interests.<sup>69</sup> According to a Somali youth, about 90 per cent of the Somali youth organisations in Kenya are clan based, yet they claim to be national. This is why it is difficult for them to pursue unifying activities.<sup>70</sup> In addition, clan-based meetings are held behind closed doors in Eastleigh and the outcomes of such meetings are statements declaring the clan's stand on certain issues.<sup>71</sup> The diaspora consultation at Chatham House in London on 8 February 2012 was an excellent example of how difficult it is for people to agree on a way forward – clan interests, the status of the self-declared Republic of Somaliland, and suspicions about one or another political actor dominated the discussions and made debates on political solutions or security highly contentious.<sup>72</sup> Owing to these clan differences it is therefore sometimes difficult for the Somali diaspora to have an impact at the national level.

### Insecurity

As mentioned earlier, supporters of al-Shabaab have attacked some diaspora groups promoting peace and discouraging religious extremism. Journalists in Somalia have not been spared either, and al-Shabaab has killed fifteen journalists so far this year. The Somali exiled journalist association is based in Kenya, where its members still receive death threats from Somali extremists. Some of the Somali diaspora would like to visit Somalia regularly to implement projects and invest in the country, but are often repulsed by the security situation. This also makes it hard for them to monitor how the remittances they send are being utilised. As a result this has contributed to allegations by the Somalis in Somalia that the diaspora are not aware of the politics of Somalia.



## Lack of funds and mistrust of civic organisations

Although Somali diaspora groups accept funding from all types of donors, they are sceptical of Somali leaders and politicians. The Somali diaspora do not contribute to diaspora groups that they are not a part of and prefer sending money to relatives. Many in the diaspora distrust the role of civic organisations dealing with Somalia. The mistrust often discourages some from collaborating with international organisations based in the countries where they are settled. In conversations, however, some of the Somali diaspora in Kenya expressed a desire to cultivate better relations with the international community and said they were open to the idea of working together to maximise the impact of diaspora contributions to relief, development and peacebuilding. This, they said, must be done carefully and must not undermine legitimate Somali leadership. They maintained that the international community can facilitate and complement the diaspora's efforts, but should not control it.<sup>73</sup>

## Lack of political will

The lack of political will in the TFG to promote inclusive processes for the diaspora and Somalis at large is seen as a critical issue. While the TFG established the Ministry of Diaspora Investment (based in London), with its main mandate being to act as the focal point between Somali people and diaspora, the members of the diaspora in Africa argue that they find it difficult to engage with the Ministry due to its location. The lack of political will to promote an inclusive approach is also seen in Somalia's political transition process. Somalia's roadmap required the TFG to choose the traditional elders, who would then pick the national constituent assembly (NCA), whose first mandate was to endorse the draft constitution. This they did on 1 August 2012. The second mandate of the NCA was to pick MPs, who were to elect the president on 20 August. There was criticism of the political process being hijacked by TFG leaders keen on retaining power. This started with the initial appointment of the Independent Federal Constitution Commission and the Committee of Experts, which was done unilaterally. However, the Somalia Minister for Constitution, Federalism and Reconciliation met with representatives from Dadaab and Dholeb refugee camps to obtain their views on the process.<sup>74</sup> Despite this, there has been no report to show what the views of the representatives were and if they were included in the constitution-making process.

Newly elected President Mohamud has indicated that he is ready to work with the Somali diaspora. On 23 September 2012, during an event organised by Somali nationals in Minneapolis, Mohamud in a telephone

conference urged the diaspora communities to support his government and take part in rebuilding the country.<sup>75</sup> In addition, the President has appointed Abdi Farah Shirdon, who has been living in Kenya since 1991, as Prime Minister – a clear indication of his confidence in the Somali diaspora.

## Mistrust among the Kenyan community and police

Human Rights Watch have recorded that police round-ups and extortion of those who cannot produce Kenyan identity cards have long been a regular feature of Eastleigh life.<sup>76</sup> Owing to this harassment, most Somalis in Kenya, especially the ones without legal refugee documents, pretend to be Kenyan-Somalis, making it difficult for them to openly engage in diaspora activities. Eastleighwood has been working with Kituo cha Sheria<sup>77</sup> to enable youths to obtain proper documents. In addition to this, the Kenyan community is sceptical of the activities of the Somalis and Kenyan Somalis, associating them with illegal trade and al-Shabaab, which has been involved in recent grenade attacks in Kenya. This makes it difficult for the Somalis to engage in any productive activities without suspicion as to where they obtained the money.

## Poor humanitarian conditions in refugee camps

The influx of refugees into the Dadaab camps is making it difficult for humanitarian organisations to provide food and medical services. In July 2012 eight organisations, including Oxfam and Save the Children, said they were facing a shortfall of US\$25 million and that the need was greater than ever.<sup>78</sup> This means that most refugees are only able to concentrate on survival and not on reconstruction in Somalia. With increasing calls by some Kenyan leaders to relocate the Dadaab camps in Somalia, the refugee situation is uncertain at the moment.

## Al-Shabaab links

In 2011, the UN monitoring group report for Somalia and Eritrea revealed the involvement of some Somalis in Kenya and some Kenyans in providing support to al-Shabaab. Although the UN monitoring report has been criticised for what has been termed selective sourcing of information, the evidence it presented cannot be ignored. Among the groups in Kenya that the report named as being involved in Somalia's protracted conflict is the Muslim Youth Centre (MYC), which has since been renamed Al Hijra, based in Majengo, Nairobi. The report revealed that the MYC, which consists of Somali diaspora, Somali Kenyans and Kenyan youth, has links with the Ansaar Muslim Youth

Centre (AMYC) in Tanzania and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen). The MYC was said to be al-Shabaab's representative in Kenya.<sup>79</sup> The UN report indicated that the MYC operated from Kenya with relative freedom, sending funds and recruits to Somalia in support of al-Shabaab, and that it was said to be involved in developing plans to launch terrorist attacks inside Kenya and deploying several operational cells for this express purpose. Kenya's role as a logistical hub for the Somali conflict is underscored by Reuters reports about al-Shabaab fighters being seen in Eastleigh, sometimes returning for medical treatment.<sup>80</sup> Reports about piracy proceeds also point to investments in Kenya, with the UN monitoring group identifying a syndicate where financial transfers from the diaspora support piracy activities off the coast of Somalia.<sup>81</sup>

Al-Shabaab supporters are not the only Somali diaspora in Kenya involved in the Somali conflict and in promoting criminal activities. According to the UN monitoring group report, on 5 April 2011 a group of Somali businessmen met at the Laico Regency Hotel in Nairobi, on the sidelines of a Somali elders' conference, to consult among themselves about ways and means to regulate the costs of facilitating visas and travel documents for their mainly Somali clientele seeking to be smuggled into Europe and destinations beyond.<sup>82</sup> This underscores the problem of people smuggling in the region that is often facilitated by those in the diaspora. In June 2012, 43 immigrants smuggled through Kenya from Ethiopia and Somalia were found dead in a truck in central Tanzania due to asphyxiation while on their way to South Africa. Some Somali victims of smuggling have been refugees from the Dadaab camps.

## POSSIBLE AREAS OF ENGAGEMENT FOR THE SOMALI DIASPORA IN THE RECONSTRUCTION PROCESS

On 13 February 2012, the former Prime Minister of Somalia, Dr Abdiweli Ali, wrote an open letter to the Somali diaspora, calling them one of best assets of Somalia society: free, educated, in possession of resources and also opinion-makers through the Internet/social media, with personal connections on the ground, and through print and electronic media. This, he wrote, was changing the way Somalis communicate even within Somalia. He added that above all, judging from the various media sources, the diaspora were very much engaged and attuned to the unfolding events in their country, a testament to their commitment to Somalia.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, if Somalia is to increase the benefits it reaps from its rich diaspora it is important for the new government to understand that its population settled abroad will play an even more central role in the political process if the government too proactively seeks to maintain links with it.<sup>84</sup>

Financial remittances, which constitute the highest portion of contributions so far, can be central to Somalia's

reconstruction as they can enhance financial economic survival, community stabilisation and economic activities in the absence of effective state institutions.<sup>85</sup> According to the UNDP report on remittances, the amount of money being sent to support community relief and development is significant; indeed, in some places it is the only assistance available.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, investments and trade initiatives by the diaspora can lead to significant change during the post-war reconstruction phase. They can also serve as catalysts for promoting peace, since the causes of conflict

## Financial remittances ... can be central to Somalia's reconstruction

are not only political but also rooted in materialistic or economic factors. Development initiatives by the diaspora have the potential to promote peace, although it should be emphasised that they are unlikely to change structures in which inequalities are deeply embedded. Moreover, development projects can offer a platform for dialogue whereby conflicting interests are translated into common needs. This would help to foster trust in peace processes among local populations by giving people hope about their future.<sup>87</sup> Looking closely at the debate over remittances, it becomes clear that remittances may influence the Somalis who receive the money to heed the ideas of the diaspora on the politics of the country. Thanks to remittances from the diaspora and international aid, combined with community and private sector initiatives, services such as communications, water supplies and electricity, transportation, schooling and health services have been re-established in some locations.<sup>88</sup>

Unlike financial remittances, which are readily accepted in a country that faces humanitarian crises from time to time, political engagement is complex in nature. Political participation includes lobbying, advocacy, participating in party politics, interactions to discuss political issues, petitions and civil protests, all of which enable the diaspora to positively contribute to politics. According to Somalia's newly adopted constitution, under Article 22 on political participation every citizen has the right to take part in public affairs. This includes the right to form political parties and to take part in the activities of political parties. Indeed, it is argued that refugees' involvement in their country of origin may be one way of their increasing their chances of repatriation. In relation to the refugees, this is a sure way of gauging the commitment of the government to repatriation. The positive involvement of refugees provides them with a political identity in relation to their home country. This will also enable the government to essentially 'keep track'

of refugee activities and monitor their engagement in homeland politics.<sup>89</sup>

Somalia's security situation has been a major setback for the country and is one of the reasons why national elections have not been conducted and a consultative constitution-making process has not been achieved. However, geographical difficulties have not stopped the diaspora from contributing to Somalia's reconstruction and the Internet has enabled information from the diaspora to reach Somalis and the international community.

Among the Somali diaspora are highly skilled professionals with much-needed experience in humanitarian, peacebuilding and developmental aspects who could contribute in providing health and education, especially through non-governmental organisations.<sup>90</sup> There is a need for the Somali diaspora to engage in rebuilding communities and ensuring that basic needs are met. The Somali diaspora have an array of contacts in their host countries and these contacts should be used to lobby for humanitarian assistance.<sup>91</sup>

Some of the more practical examples where members of the Somali diaspora have been actively engaged so far include organising two peacebuilding workshops between 2007 and 2008 on the 'role of religion and conflict transformation' that were held in Hargeisa and attended by prominent Somalis.<sup>92</sup> In the early 1990s the Somaliland diaspora established the Somaliland Peace Committee, which has resulted in an active engagement in Somali politics, making the Somaliland diaspora a good example of diaspora engagement in reconstruction efforts.<sup>93</sup> The Justice and Development Party (UCID), which is currently the third largest party in Somaliland, was established by the Somaliland diaspora and is locally known as the 'diaspora party'.<sup>94</sup> The Somali diaspora have been actively engaged through social media in the political debate in Somalia by writing articles and engaging in forums on websites and radio stations. They also have set up businesses that cut across clan and regional lines. This can be crucial to building trust and developing better communication between communities.<sup>95</sup> The proportion of diaspora representatives in successive governments continues to grow. In January 2008, the Prime Minister and two-thirds of the Cabinet (10 out of 15 Ministers) were diaspora members. In the Cabinet appointed in February 2009, the Prime Minister and half of the Cabinet (18 out of 37 Ministers) were diaspora returnees. In addition to the ministerial positions, most of the senior civil servants were also from the diaspora.<sup>96</sup>

Social remittances and lobbying by the Somali diaspora have resulted in the establishment of lobby groups to push for different agendas to bring peace and development to Somalia. The Somali Canadian Diaspora Alliance (SCDA), Somali American Peace Council (SAPC) and Somali Diaspora Network (SDN) have lobbied both the Somali government and the host country government to support the withdrawal of

Ethiopian troops from Somalia.<sup>97</sup> Owing to the humanitarian crisis in Somalia, diaspora members have used both formal and informal ways to collect money for development needs and humanitarian assistance, with the Somali diaspora in Scandinavia each contributing €5-20 per month.<sup>98</sup>

Questions have been asked as to whether the refugees in camps have political rights. The very act of recognising refugees as having a political identity is an important form of protection in its own right. However, political activities are arguably of particular significance when directed towards a refugee's country of origin. The political participation of displaced populations in their country of origin's politics also has a real and substantive value in terms of reconstruction activities. By facilitating refugee engagement in political negotiations following conflict, these groups are more likely to understand themselves as stakeholders in the peace building and reconstruction processes. However, it is equally evident that the difficulties lie in the details of facilitating and promoting political engagement.<sup>99</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The civil unrest in Somalia dispersed a large number of Somalis to different parts of the globe. Owing to the efforts of the international community in establishing a new government, there is a renewed sense of hope for Somalia's reconstruction. The Somali diaspora can be one of the main contributors to these efforts. Although the government has invited the diaspora to join national processes, apart from the financial remittances, there is a need for channels to be established to create greater socio-economic and political participation by the diaspora. It is very important that the new government prioritises the improvement of the security situation in the country in order to create an environment that will attract Somalis in diaspora to travel and invest in their home country. It also needs to create channels such as establishing a liaison office that will sustain diaspora participation in all facets of nation-building, including policymaking.

Somalia is now firmly established in its reconstruction process to ensure peace, stability and economic growth for the Somali people. With Somalis widely calling for a Somali-led and -driven process, it is essential that all Somalis in and outside Somalia become involved in the reconstruction of their conflict-ridden country.

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