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**Working Paper**

## Opportunities and pitfalls in the migration-development nexus: Somaliland and beyond

DIIS Working Paper, No. 2004:21

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Copenhagen

*Suggested Citation:* Nyberg Sørensen, Ninna (2004) : Opportunities and pitfalls in the migration-development nexus: Somaliland and beyond, DIIS Working Paper, No. 2004:21, ISBN 8776050424, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Copenhagen

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/84581>

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**OPPORTUNITIES AND PITFALLS  
IN THE MIGRATION-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS:  
SOMALILAND AND BEYOND**

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*DIIS Working Paper 2004/21*

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Cover Design: Carsten Schiøler

Printed in Denmark by Vesterkopi AS

ISBN: 87-7605-042-4

Price: DKK 25.00 (VAT included)

DIIS publications can be downloaded

free of charge from [www.diis.dk](http://www.diis.dk)

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## Abstract

Against the background of increased human mobility over the last three decades, resurgent interest in the migration-development nexus has stimulated new lines of academic inquiry and pushed policy considerations in new directions. This paper outlines current discussions around the links between migration, development and conflict. It also considers the complex nature of ‘mixed flows’, the difficulties in distinguishing between forced/political and voluntary/economic migration, and the links to development from these various – and often overlapping – types of flows. The paper uses migration from Somalia/Somaliland as the main example. This case – like the cases of most other sending countries - is of course specific. Still lessons can be drawn that are useful in other contexts, and may provide a basis for constructive discussion of potential opportunities in the current migration and international cooperation regimes,

An edited version of this Working Paper will appear in a book edited by Kristof Tamas, the Institute for Future Studies in Stockholm, 2005.

## Introduction

Against the background of increased human mobility over the last three decades, resurgent interest in the migration-development nexus has stimulated new lines of academic inquiry and pushed policy considerations in new directions. This chapter outlines current discussions around the links between migration, development and conflict. It also considers the complex nature of ‘mixed flows’, the difficulties in distinguishing between forced/political and voluntary/economic migration, and the links to development from these various – and often overlapping – types of flows.

By the turn of the Millennium it was estimated that 175 million people lived in another country than that of their birth, of which 60 percent were to be found in more developed countries and 40 percent in developing countries (UN Population Division 2002). Of these, some are persons with legal status in the countries of settlement. Others are in an irregular situation and try by various means to regularize their status. A relative small proportion has been granted refugee status (Van Kessel 2002). It is generally acknowledged that increased mobility has led to a growing *complexity* of migratory movements. This complexity manifests itself in a substitution of ‘old’ migration destinations by new ones, a growing class *diversification* and *informalization* of migration, a *feminization* of particular streams, and the phenomenon of ‘mixed flows’. In the tension between transnational flows of people and states, new forms of control mechanisms and policies are emerging as the scope and constituency for policy interventions into the migration-development nexus broaden. Any informed discussion of how to make migration work for development and related policy options can only be achieved by taking such complexities into account.

International migration has been both prompted and facilitated by globalization. Apart from the growing disparity in the levels of livelihood possibilities and human security to be found in different parts of the world, other factors have contributed to the current magnitude, density, velocity, and diversity of human population movements. These include improved transportation, communication and information technology; the expansion of transnational social networks and diaspora formations; and the emergence of a commercial (sometimes criminal) industry devoted to facilitating human movement across international borders. However, while the cornerstone of globalization has been an increase in the international flow of trade, capital, information and services, the right to freedom of movement – especially for poor migrants, refugees and asylum seekers – has been severely curtailed. Migrant workers and people in flight, although mobile by definition, are actually among those excluded from the

freedom and benefits of borderless globalization (Jordão 2001). The increasing number of migrants, as well as the containment of others, therefore reflects the limitations of globalization (Martin 2001a).

Together with poverty, human rights abuses associated with poor governance have become among the key factors impelling much current migration, and it is no coincidence that conflict-ridden countries are often those with severe economic difficulties. In many parts of the world, people are forced to abandon their homes due to severe breakdown of economic and social conditions. In addition environmental devastation beyond restoration and lack of access to natural resources increasingly propel people to migrate. Others find that the growing inequalities in wealth between and within countries make migration the only viable option in order to secure better economic prospects and upward social mobility.

Way into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many nation states regarded the loss of people through emigration as a serious loss of its resources. Increasingly, however, migrant sending countries recognize that although many migrants are unlikely to return, they can still advance state consolidation and national development from abroad (Levitt 2001). Not only do migrants send remittances. They also have the potential to be organized into strong lobbies that advocate for sending country interests. In response, sending states may endow migrants with special extraterritorial rights, protections and recognitions, in the hope of ensuring their long term support (Basch et al. 1994; Smith 1998; Goldring 2001).

A similar awareness about the role that migration can play in development processes is increasing at the international level. Besides a growing commitment to by the European Commission in this field, single member states are currently experimenting with different approaches to policies linking migration and development. Most of these attempts have taken their point of departure in *either migration or* development concerns (e.g. reallocation of development aid to migrant producing countries conditioned on such countries' willingness to limit emigration and the return of their nationals as compared to making migration a tool for development, see Sørensen et al. 2003a).

Contrary to discussions linking migration and development, international refugee policy has increasingly been characterized by attempts to contain refugees (and other migrants) in the countries or regions origin. The attempts at creating 'safe havens' within areas of conflict, the discussions raised regarding 'the right to stay', and the progressive institutionalization of the field of internally displaced persons have been interpreted as a kind of 'internalization' of the refugee problem. The latest developments in the EU point in the same direction, in particular

the attempts at developing an ‘external dimension’ of Justice and Home Affairs since 1999, and the British, Dutch, and Danish proposals for new approaches to asylum policies and protection (Stepputat 2004).

The following discussion uses migration from Somalia/Somaliland as the main example.<sup>1</sup> This case – like the cases of most other sending countries - is of course specific. Still lessons can be drawn that are useful in other contexts, and may provide a basis for constructive discussion of ‘mixed flows’ (next section), migration as a development resource (section 2) and possible opportunities in the current migration and international cooperation regimes (concluding section).

## I. Migrant or refugee? The problem of ‘mixed flows’

In 2003 the European Commission noted that the “abuse of asylum procedures is on the rise, as are *mixed migratory flows*, often maintained by smuggling practices involving both people with a legitimate need for international protection and migrants using asylum procedures to gain access to the Member States to improve their living conditions” (COM 2003/152 final). Entangling the issues of asylum and economic migration easily leads to the accusation that asylum seekers more often than not are economic migrants abusing the system, an accusation further confounded with the issue of human smuggling and people trafficking.

In reality few source countries produce only asylum seekers or economic migrants. In many cases, migrants from one sending country comprise economic migrants who have used the asylum route, asylum seekers who have used the migration route, and individuals who have used other routes, including both legal and illegal. In other cases, the reasons for migrating may have changed over time. What maybe began as economic migration may due to changes in local circumstances come to include internal displacement or international refugee movements, and conversely, what was originally refugee movements may transmute into migration

<sup>1</sup> I build on a 2 weeks field visit to Somaliland in September 2002 as well as secondary data from the literature concerned with the Somali nomadic culture, the diaspora, the refugee crisis, and return and repatriation. My analysis has benefited from a study of livelihood and reintegration dynamics in Somaliland that I undertook jointly with Nicholas Van Hear for the Danish Refugee Council (Sørensen and Van Hear 2003), as well as from numerous discussions with Nauja Kleist, Peter Hansen and Joakim Gundel, all conducting their PhD research at DIIS.



for economic improvement. Statuses also change over time in ways that differ according to the policies of receiving countries (Martin 2001a). In both cases, transnational families or households may consist of individuals who migrated for different reasons. When migrants reach their destinations, refugees may live alongside co-nationals who are not necessarily refugees but rather part of broader communities of newcomers (Crisp 1999); and – as has been the case of Somalis - asylum seekers and refugees may also enter prior currents of labour. Finally, variation in migration regimes in countries of destination may lead to situations in which dispersed family members – who may have migrated for the same economic or political reasons – hold different statuses.

The dispersal of the Somali diaspora – in peace as well as during protracted periods of armed conflict – is emblematic of such complexities and provides a good illustration of the problem of ‘mixed flows’ as well as the difficulties in distinguishing between different, overlapping, and shifting flows.

## **SOMALI MOBILITY**

Throughout the years, substantial numbers of Somalis have migrated. The total number of Somalis living outside Somalia has been estimated at one million (Nair and Abdulla 1998; UNDP 2001). This figure presumably includes those who have naturalised in their countries of residence. In addition Somalis are currently one of the most widely dispersed diasporas in the world: in the late 1990s, asylum applications by Somali nationals were recorded in more than 60 countries. The African neighbour states remain the main countries of asylum.

One explanation of this dispersal can be found in Somali nomadic livelihoods, which is often said to be at the heart of Somali culture. For example, Lewis (1961) describes the livelihoods of the Somali pastoralist as characterized by strategies of mobility and dispersal in order to survive in an extremely harsh climate. Likewise, Marshal (1996) points to the centrality of migration in Somali culture, which he then characterizes by its subsistence economy, trade to procure necessities not domestically produced, and transhumance to adapt to cycles of climate in search of pastures. Among pastoralists in Somalia, social relationships established between

extended family members reflect not only the production of a livelihood but also this livelihood's continued reproduction.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the well-established traditions of nomadic movement within Somalia and across the border to neighbouring countries (Ethiopia and Kenya), Somalis have a long tradition of migration outside the region. During British colonialism, an early Somali diaspora emerged as seamen from colonial British Somaliland working in the Merchant Navy began settling in the port cities of London, Bristol, Cardiff, Liverpool and Hull. The Somali community in the United Kingdom grew further with the expansion of the steel industry in the 1950s and 60s (Simkin 2002). Other seamen went to America, Russia or Arab countries to work in the maritime trade (Cassanelli 1982). Today, after sailing for almost a century, several retired seamen have settled in cities like Cardiff and Copenhagen, while others have returned to the Somali-inhabited area of the Horn of Africa (Hansen 2004).

After independence in 1960, many disappointed supporters of the ruling Somali Youth League, especially those stemming from the north-western Isaaq clan, migrated abroad as they had lost their assets and were denied access to new resources. From the early 1970s, Somalia became a major labour exporter to the oil producing Arab countries. It is estimated that between 150,000 and 200,000 Somalis migrated to the Gulf during the 1970s. By 1987 their numbers had doubled to an estimated 375,000. These migrants were relatively well educated, travelling abroad for better employment and higher earnings than they could find in Somalia (Gundel 2003). Another group of Somalis began migrating for higher education to North America, Europe and the Soviet Union during the same period. Due to new entry restrictions (and the high cost of education in the West), educational flows have today been redirected towards India and Pakistan (Hansen 2004).

The largest number of Somalis to leave the Horn of Africa has done so because of civil war and political unrest. Hundreds of thousands Somalis were sent into exile in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The outbreak of civil war in 1988 and the inter-clan fighting after the fall of Siad

<sup>2</sup> Looking beyond the egalitarian and ethnically homogenous culture described by Lewis, Besteman (1999) focus attention to those Somali nationals who arrived as slaves from the area stretching between contemporary Kenya to Mozambique to work on Somali owned plantations, thereby further complicating the mobility picture.

Barre in 1991 displaced hundreds of thousands of Somalis within the country<sup>3</sup> and drove many others to leave to seek refuge in Ethiopia, Kenya, Yemen and other neighbouring countries<sup>4</sup>, as well as to seek asylum further afield in the UK, Italy, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Canada, the US and other Western states.<sup>5</sup> Some were able to follow paths and networks already established by 'economic' migrants.

At present the UK and Italy host the largest long-distance Somali diaspora communities, based on historical and colonial ties. These long-established communities have been supplemented by more recent inflows of asylum seekers. In 2000, the UK received nearly half the asylum applications by Somalis in European countries, nearly 4,800 out of 10,900. Most Somali refugees in London originate in the by now self-declared Republic of Somaliland (Ahmed 2000). The Netherlands and Scandinavian countries have been the next most 'popular' destinations for asylum seekers. These countries, together with Germany, to which asylum applications in recent years have been minimal, have substantial Somali populations, mainly based on asylum migration. Italy has become one of the major destinations for irregular labour migration, including Somalis. Today Somali women compete with Philippine, Romanian and Ukrainian housekeepers, baby-sitters and care-workers to take up jobs for millions of Italian families. IRIN (2003) reports that agents in Mogadishu can charge double the price for smuggling Somali girls into Italy (US\$ 7,000 as compared to US\$ 3,500 to other European countries) because the girls get jobs as housekeepers and can start sending money home immediately. Outside Europe, North America has been the major attraction: some 19,000 Somalis applied for asylum in Canada and 8,000 in the US in 1990-98 (Frushone 2001).

Many Somali families have separated along the way, and the paths of those who managed to flee armed conflicts to for the wider diaspora were seldom straightforward but involved years in refugee camps or convoluted journeys via countries where they could get temporary visas

<sup>3</sup> There has been substantial internal displacement, ranging between 500,000 and 1.5 million people, and currently set at around 300,000-400,000 (UNDP 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Interviews in Somaliland indicated that many never went into camps but rather took their livestock to the other side of the border. Some 'registered' as refugees. Because they were not 'fenced in' in camps they were able to maintain links to Somaliland.

<sup>5</sup> By 1992, UNHCR estimated that more than 800,000 Somalis – out of an estimated population of five to seven million – were refugees, scattered in refugee camps in neighbouring countries, but also in western Europe (the UK, the Netherlands, Italy and Sweden being the main countries of asylum), and in the United States and Canada (UNHCR 2002). This is almost the double number than estimated in 2001, when UNHCR operated with a total number of Somali refugees at 440,000.

(McGown 1999:14). Deteriorating conditions in certain asylum countries have provoked some Somalis to move on. This has for instance been the case for a smaller group of Somalis who have gained citizenship in Denmark but subsequently have moved to England, a country they perceive as being less xenophobic and more open to Somalis than Denmark.<sup>6</sup>

This brief overview of Somali migration patterns gives evidence of the growing complexity of migratory flows. Throughout the years new migration destinations have been added to old ones, class diversification seem to be congruent with distance (the better off, the longer distance traveled), and certain out-going flows – e.g. to Italy – have become feminized. As has hopefully become clear, the Somali diaspora does not fit neatly into either the ‘forced’ or the ‘voluntary’ category. Not because the bulk of Somali asylum seekers in general have been ‘economic migrants’ using the asylum procedure to circumvent established migration controls, but rather because different historical periods have provoked different forms of movement. Differing migration regimes in different host countries have further added to a situation in which Somalis – who may have left Somalia at the same time and for the same reasons – hold different statuses. Access to financial means and social networks (including access to diaspora links established prior to the conflict as well as access to ‘carriers’ or ‘human smugglers’) to a large degree explains why Somali refugees ended up in different destinations – were internally displaced, fled to neighbouring countries, or were able to find refuge in the wider diaspora.

It may well be that the muddling of the metaphors of ‘fleeing poverty’ and ‘fleeing to escape persecution’ has been seriously damaging to those genuinely in need of shelter (Nicholson 2002) - and has provided fuel to the current dysfunctional asylum and migration regime (Crisp 2002). With the difficulties in maintaining a clear distinction between forced and voluntary migration in mind, it is still relevant – especially in relation to developing possible strategies for reforming migration-development policies – to ask if the relationship between different types of migration and development are of the same nature and to what extent refugees and migrants have the same interests in and potentials for contributing to local development?

<sup>6</sup> In January 2002, following a heated media debate on female circumcision, a group of Somali refugees living in Denmark were asking UNHCR to be transferred to another and less xenophobic country.

## 2. Migration as a development resource

As migration has steadily climbed up the list of public and policy concerns, it has become increasingly recognized that migration can be affected – intentionally or not – by interventions in the kindred areas of development policy and humanitarian assistance, as well as by the wider policies and practices in the foreign and domestic spheres. Underlying much international thinking on development and migration has been the effectiveness of reducing migration and refugee flows by generating local development, preventing and resolving local conflicts, and retaining refugees in neighbouring or first countries of asylum, an approach commonly referred to as ‘combating the root causes of migration’.

The idea that development should be fostered to stop – or at least reduce – migration pressures can be found in various documents of the European Commission throughout the 1990s. During the late 1990s, however, this approach demonstrated its structural limits. Academic analysis (within sociology and anthropology, but also within economics and political science) presented evidence that economic and social development does indeed affect mobility, but not in the rather instrumental way suggested by the ‘root cause’ approach. On the contrary, a simultaneous increase in economic productivity may increase mobility, at least in the short term (Pastore 2003). The ‘root cause’ approach therefore gained competition from what became known as the ‘migration hump’ approach, the paradox that the same economic policies that can reduce migration in the long term can increase it in the short term (Martin 2004).

During the Danish EU presidency, the former Centre for Development Research in Copenhagen introduced a third ‘transnational’ approach to the policy arena (Sørensen et al. 2003b).<sup>7</sup> This approach sees internal, regional and international mobility as an intrinsic dimension of development and understands mobility as an *essential condition* for economic and social development. The arguments forwarded in this paper build on this approach and are elaborated below in relation to three particular areas, namely remittances, return and repatriation, and diaspora support.

<sup>7</sup> The European Commission adopted large parts of this approach in its preliminary Communication on Migration and Development (COM 2002/703 final).

## REMITTANCES

Policy discussions on migrants as a development resource have primarily focuses on remittances. Evidence suggests that the financial flow from migrants and refugees are like to be considerably larger than the size of development aid and as least as well targeted at the poor in both conflict-ridden and stable developing countries (Sørensen 2004). The World Bank estimates that in 2002 the global flow of migrants' official remittances amounted to US\$ 80 billion, with over 60 percent going to developing countries. To further underline the development dimension of migrant transfers, remittances seem to be more stable than private capital flows and to be less volatile to changing economic cycles (Ratha 2003:160). In many less developed countries remittances amount on average to 13 percent of GDP (IOM 2003), and often account for a much higher share as, for instance, in Somalia, where an estimated 25-40 percent of all families receive remittances from abroad (UNDP & ECSU 2003).

Compared to other regions in the world African remittance data are generally scarce or confronted with a lack of reliability. According to a recent World Bank study, this may in part be explained by the relatively low share of migrant remittances flowing to the African continent (15%), and the even lower share flowing to Sub-Saharan Africa (5%). Contrary to remittances to Latin America and Asia, remittances to Africa have grown only little and, as a result, have declined in relative share. But, as the report also states, this is partly due to the high level of data gaps for African countries in international remittance statistics (for Sub-Saharan Africa, IMF remittance data is only available for about one third of the countries (Sander 2003:6).<sup>8</sup> Remittances seem to be even more important if informal remittances are taken into account. Evidence from Sudan and Egypt suggest that the informal remittances double, and in some cases even triple the total amount of migrants' financial transfers. Given that the banking systems in many African countries still is inadequately developed, it is safe to assume that informal remittances are very important in Africa (IOM 2003:227).

As a result of the collapse of the Somali state and commercial banking system, formal financial institutions still do not function. Remittances are therefore sent through private remittance companies known as *xawilaad*. As in other post-conflict countries, where little or no formal financial infrastructure exists, informal remittance systems may help maintain entire payment systems and channel external funds for reconstruction from the diaspora (DfID 2003). It is likely that remittances are unevenly distributed, since poorer households do not have the

<sup>8</sup> In 2001, the top five remittance receiving countries in Africa were Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Sudan and Uganda. In Sub-Saharan Africa the single largest receiver was Nigeria, followed by Lesotho, Sudan, Senegal and Mauritius.

resources needed to send members to places where earnings or welfare provisions are sufficient to allow sending money home.

To Somalia as a whole, remittance estimates range from US\$ 120 million a year (Montclos & Kagwanja 2000) to US\$ 1 billion in 2000 (UNDP & ECSU 2003). To Somaliland alone, estimates range from US\$ 100-500 million annually. A 1997 study conducted by the Ministry of Planning in Somaliland estimated that US\$ 93 million were being transferred that year (Ahmed 2000).

Members of the Somali diaspora remit money to support the livelihood of their remaining family members. These remittances typically stand at US\$ 50-200 per month, and are primarily spent on consumption, education and health. During interviews in urban resettlement areas of Hargeisa in 2002, a sub-station manager at the remittance company Dahabshiil reported that relatively few repatriated camp refugees receive remittances as compared to those living in central Hargeisa with links to the wider diaspora. Those who do, usually receive a monthly money order of US\$100 from Europe, North America and the Arab states (in that order). This money is distributed among extended family members, including people still living in rural areas. Interviews in rural areas confirmed this pattern

The limited evidence available on refugees' remittances suggests that these transfers are used in ways similar to those sent by other migrants: for daily subsistence, health care, housing, and education. Paying off debt may also be prominent, especially when there have been substantial outlays to send asylum migrants abroad, or when assets have been destroyed, sold off, or lost during conflict. Expatriates may also fund the migration of other family members, either in the form of monetary transfers back home, payments for tickets, documents, and accommodation and migration agents. Expatriates may also meet other costs incurred during and after travel (Van Hear 2003).

As previously mentioned, Somaliland is seen by many in the diaspora as a country of opportunity where commercial regulations are minimal and the scope for entrepreneurship wide open. As the 2001 UNDP report points out, the civil war achieved what the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s did not, that is, economic deregulation that enabled the expansion of the private sector. One should not forget, however, that the conditions that provide an environment conducive for the activities of the diaspora and other businesspeople are those which spell poor conditions for the population at large.

Somalilanders from the wider diaspora are currently engaged in opening small scale businesses – restaurants, beauty salons, transport companies, supermarkets and kiosks – often through the investment of savings made while abroad. Compared to starting a business abroad, the capital needed to open up in Somaliland is quite modest. Partly because of the absence of a functioning state, with its financial, economic and social institutions, the private sector has grown tremendously, and traditional government services like provision of education, health care and electricity have largely been taken over by private companies, or in practice been privatized (Hansen 2003). Apart from small scale business investments, remittances are also invested in land and housing. Finally remittances flow in the form of collective donations made by organizations created in the diaspora (Hansen 2003).<sup>9</sup>

## RETURN AND REPATRIATION

Return and repatriation are generally seen as the natural ‘end product’ of the migration cycle and a prerequisite for migrants’ and refugees’ continued engagement with local development. Ideally, migrants are expected to have saved capital and acquired skills abroad that can be productively invested in the sending country (Sørensen et al. 2003a). Of the three ‘durable’ solutions to refugee crises – integration in the first country of asylum, resettlement in a third country, or return to the homeland – the latter is seen as the best and most ‘natural’ option. Yet, inadequate attention has been given to selectivity in terms of returnees’ personal characteristics, duration of stay abroad, level of incorporation into host countries, and the motivations underlying different types of return.

Several studies suggests that return after a relatively short period abroad, especially among low skilled migrants and if caused by an inability to adapt to the host country or unforeseen and adverse family circumstances is less likely to contribute to development. Return after a longer stay abroad, when the migrant have saved money to meet specific development purposes back

<sup>9</sup> Compared to the volume of family and business flows, most observers agree that collective remittances are almost negligible (King 2003). A recent Somali Online Voting Booth comes up with the following result to the question ‘who do you send money to?’ 29 percent send money to their mother, 16 percent to their father, 8 percent to their grandparents, and 37 percent to other relatives. 4 percent actually report remittances for home town development, whereas 6 percent state that they support political activities (<http://www.somalipress.com>).



home, has far better development prospects (*ibid.*). Whether return/repatriation will benefit local development will vary and is primarily determined by two factors: the aptitude and preparation of the returnees, and whether or not the country of origin provides a propitious social, economic and institutional environment for the returnees to use their economic and human capital productively (Ghosh 2000). In the case of refugee repatriation, a political climate facilitating former adversaries to begin to work together is an additional factor. Evidence nevertheless suggests that states with a history of violent conflict or civil war may be more eager to capture the resources of refugees abroad than to encourage their return and competition over resources in the post-conflict nation-state building process (for the case of Eritrea, see Koser 2002; for the case of El Salvador, see Mahler 2002).

In the case of Somalia, repatriation has picked up in recent years, primarily to the relatively peaceful self-declared Republic of Somaliland. From February 1997 to October 2001, UNHCR officially assisted the voluntary repatriation of an estimated 170,000 refugees back to Somaliland (Frushone 2001). In 2002, the UNHCR objective was to repatriate 60,000, a figure revised to 50,000 by mid-year. By the end of the year 32,020 refugees had repatriated, most of them to Somaliland. Of these 29,631 were repatriated from Ethiopia. UNHCR estimates that a total of 456,733 refugees returned to Somalia (mainly Somaliland) under their protection (UNHCR Somalia 2002). Others highlight that most repatriation has been 'spontaneous' and 'self-organised' as opposed to organized by UNHCR. Instead of relying on international institutions, refugees and returnees have relied on social networks, mobility and diversified investments to overcome the endemic insecurity of the region. Social networks were mobilized both at the time of flight (the vast majority of refugees settled in their clan areas across the border) and of return (i.e. reliance on charity from relatives once the repatriation package was exhausted) (Ambroso 2002).

In addition to repatriated refugees from neighbouring countries, substantial numbers of Somalilanders from the wider diaspora have been coming back over the last few years to see if they can live in Somaliland again. These have taken up roles in government, aid agencies, non-government organizations, health care, education, and in business, and are putting energy and resources into reconstruction. During my short field visit to Somaliland in 2002, I found that several research and higher education institutions were headed and staffed by returnees, founders and teachers at several primary and secondary schools were returnees (and funds were usually raised in the diaspora), several businesses were run by returnees (telecommunication companies, internet providers, insurance companies and private health clinics), and NGOs as well as government institutions were staffed by migrants returning from the wider diaspora. Interestingly, most of the returned female professionals worked for international

agencies and NGOs whereas male professionals were found to concentrate in state institutions and private businesses.

Return from the wider diaspora often took the form of 'staggered repatriation' in which one family member, often the family father, had gone back while the rest of the family stayed in the country of asylum or residence. The acquisition of a high status citizenship (European or North American) almost always precedes such staggered returns (Fink Nielsen et al. 2002). Together, the acquisition of citizenship and the dividing up of family members secures both continued access to diaspora resources and security should a new conflict break out. But even the most dedicated and patriotic Somalilanders who have returned to Somaliland to engage in processes of reconstruction may not return in the sense of settling permanently in the country. Many may become 'revolving returnees' who after an intended 'permanent' return go back to Europe or North America, either because they have been unable to renew their contracts within the 'development industry', have failed in their business efforts, or have been unable to convince their families in the wider diaspora to join them (Hansen 2003).<sup>10</sup>

Nicholas Van Hear has consistently argued that when people flee conflict or persecution, a common pattern is for most to seek safety in other parts of their own country, for a substantial number to look for refuge in neighbouring countries, and for a smaller number to seek asylum in countries further afield. If displacement persists and people consolidate themselves in their territories of refuge, complex relations will develop among these different domains of the refuge diaspora. He goes on to suggest that each of these domains to some extent correspond to the three locations associated with the three durable solutions that the UNHCR is charged with pursuing for refugees. Looking at some of the shortcomings of the notion of 'durable solutions', Van Hear suggests that diaspora and the sustaining of transnational relations might represent the most enduring, if not durable, solution to many current situations of displacement (Van Hear 2003). The case of Somalis/Somalilanders seems to lend itself to this suggestion. Massive repatriation and return, on the other hand, may have negative consequences for local development not least due to a diminution of remittances which – in the worst case scenario - may lead to renewed instability, socioeconomic or political upheaval, and the resumption or provocation of conflict.

<sup>10</sup> Ambroso (2002) refers to a similar situation among those returning from the neighbouring countries, by pointing to mobility and diversified investment as two sides of the same coin: staggered repatriation (some family members self-repatriating while others remain in the camp) allowed families to prepare the ground for repatriation while at the same time retaining a ration card enabling access to assistance and service as a safety net.

## DIASPORA SUPPORT

Several studies have indicated that migrants are important not only as a source of family remittances and investors in the local economies, but also as potential lobbyists or ‘ambassadors’ of national interests abroad. Homeland engagement can take a variety of forms, including exile groups organizing themselves for return, groups lobbying on behalf on a homeland abroad, external offices of political parties, or opposition groups campaigning or planning actions to effect political change in the homeland (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001). Apart from beneficial homeland political allegiances, diaspore support may also involve buying-in to dubious regimes and overseas support for insurgency and terrorism.

The valuable contribution of diasporas to home country development is increasingly acknowledged.

Efforts to create closer relationships between state institutions and a given state’s migrant communities abroad has included forming and/or consolidating migrant associations abroad, often in the form of home town associations (HTAs). HTAs have served as platforms for matching funds schemes that pool remittances with government funds and expertise, potentially resulting in improvements in local health, education and employment conditions, benefiting migrant and non-migrant households alike (Smith 2001). Towns and villages that are connected to home town associations abroad tend to be better off in terms of infrastructure and access to services than those who have no such connections (Landolt 2001). However, the cooptation of migrant resources into development projects – “designed by the state but financed by migrants” – may be contested by migrants if they experience “the state as diverting their energies from true civil society and local development initiatives across borders” (Smith 2003:467).

The existence of Somali diaspora groups is a consequence of traditional mobile livelihood patterns, colonialism, labour migration and the humanitarian disasters in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Unwilling to accept a life in exiled silence, the groups have continued to perform an active role through remittances which in turn has given entitlement to a strong and vocal political participation, facilitated by new technology (IRIN 2001).

The most assertive Somaliland diaspora group is the Somaliland Forum which started as a discussion group on the internet and only later developed into an association involved in Somaliland through collective remittances for development projects and politically motivated activities in Somaliland, Europe and North America. The Forum describes itself as an

association working with Somalilanders around the world, its main premise being that the most important resource for the future development of Somaliland is the human resources scattered in the diaspora. Its activities include the sponsoring of public programmes benefiting a wide range of needs, e.g. education, health and infrastructure (Hansen 2004).

The Forum has run a relentless campaign for Somaliland independence, concentrating primarily on direct petitioning of politicians and international organisations, as well as monitoring media output. This leads IRIN (2001) to characterize the Forum as a diaspora constituency that may be as much a political liability as an asset, over which the Somaliland leadership exercises no control.

Somali peace and equality activists constitute another group worth mentioning. These activists have consistently argued that it is Somali women who bear the brunt of the problems facing Somalia/Somaliland. Using the argument that local women are the mothers, sisters and wives who have had to care for the family after the men were killed, and that the majority of Somali families are supported by their daughters, nieces and sisters who send remittances from abroad, they have lobbied internationally for the recognition of women in a country ruled by clan structures denying women any voice (PeaceWoman 2003).

As the examples above have shown, diasporas can potentially strengthen the peace and development processes by bringing together the human resources in the diaspora with a view to stimulating reconciliation, reconstruction efforts, and a combination of traditional and modern forms of government. In addition, the diaspora may also participate in the development of the educational system, the supply of professionally trained health workers with both formal and cultural competences, help establish occupational projects in the business sector, agriculture, animal husbandry and the fishing industry, and, in the case of Somaliland, strengthen local opposition to excessive qat chewing and female circumcision. It should be stressed, however, that diaspora activities necessarily benefit society at large. As seen from the quotes below, the potential contribution of the Somaliland diaspora is evaluated in different ways by different stake holders:

“The Somaliland educated and viable strata – at home and within the diaspora – must strive to cooperate through the formation of professional organizations, trusts and NGOs ... and should be utilized to provide and administer financial investments for emergencies, rehabilitation and development. The diaspora should be urged to organize to promote the welfare and development of their peoples. They should make any effort to promote visits, conferences and other

modes of interaction and pay particular attention to visits by their children so as to strengthen their knowledge of their language, religion and culture”.<sup>11</sup>

“We need those with skills to return, the professionals. If the returnees have no resources when they come here they are not welcome. It is not good to come home without resources. [Such returnees] put more pressure on society and create more unemployment. They have to return with something ... [We] do not want them to come with empty pockets”.<sup>12</sup>

“Regarding the idea of diaspora involvement, I am sceptical. It would be very difficult unless they are well organized from abroad. They need to define clearly which objectives to achieve – but I have never seen that. Those who return have a leg abroad and only try to make money here. Somalis are all individualists. Everyone is striving alone”.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Policy recommendations

Recognition of the shifting geo-political context has promoted diverse forms of migratory movements, and in particular has demanded a rethinking of the hitherto largely separated policy fields of migration and development. Acknowledgement of the difficulties of making and maintaining a clear distinction between voluntary and forced migration has emerged, and awareness of the complexity of diaspora formation has grown.

The habitual separation between refugees and migrants is to a large extent a reflection of categories which have been developed in (and between) state institutions for the administrative and political control of mobility. But while distinct approaches to asylum and migration makes sense from a humanitarian as well as from an immigration policy concern, working with mutually exclusive categories may be less helpful in facilitating migration-

<sup>11</sup> Recommendations from the 1st conference on reconstruction strategies and challenges beyond rehabilitation, Hargeisa 1998.

<sup>12</sup> I owe this interview extract to Peter Hansen, who interviewed the Somaliland Minister of RRR in Hargeisa 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Personal interview with the Deputy programme manager of the Danish Refugee Council, himself a returnee from the wider diaspora, Hargeisa 2002.

development links from a development policy angle. Attempting to ‘undo’ the determining link between status categories and development impact, I suggest bringing refugee and migrant diasporas together and to juxtapose and illuminate the under-explored development potentials in ‘transnational’, ‘transregional’ and ‘translocal’ mobility.<sup>14</sup>

From their often precarious position in Western as well as neighbouring countries, migrants provide dependants back home with remittances for their daily survival, and several states on the margins of the global economy encourage and receive vital funding from their diasporas. However such contributions may be double-edged: at times the diaspora may be involved in development and/or post-conflict reconstruction, while in other cases such funds are channelled into prolongation of local inequalities or even the financing of violent conflicts. Hence, the recent interest on behalf of some international agencies in policing such diasporas.

The use of remittances as a resource for development requires better answers to some fundamental questions such as: how can governments best estimate the actual flows of financial as well as social remittances; are there better ways to estimate more precisely how remittances are transferred and used, and what alternative ways can be envisioned; to what extent can the multiplier effect of remittances be increased by initiatives to encourage productive and work creating investments; what can be done to lower transfer costs in order to maximize the level of remittances reaching family members, local communities and ultimately states; and how can governments and international development organizations assist organized groups, such as HTAs and home villages to make the most effective use of collective remittances for development without impeding local initiatives?

The development potential of remittances can obviously be improved by increasing the total flow of remittances, lowering the transfer costs, reducing the risks involved in transfers and offering more attractive investment alternatives. In addition to monetary remittances’ potential for improving economic activities, social remittances may gradually spread to political, cultural and social activities and create transnational communities (Levitt 2001). Such developments should be encouraged by international development agencies.

In conflict countries such as Somalia, the securing of open transfer channels seems crucial. An initial challenge facing development efforts linked to remittances is to ensure that existing ‘in-

<sup>14</sup> I take these three domains to correspond to the wider diaspora, migrants in neighbouring countries, and intra national migrants/IDPs.

formal' remittance sectors are not automatically closed down because of accusations of being linked to international terrorism. To counter the possibility of such charges being made, the international community should engage in dialogue with *xawilaad*, *bundi* and other traditional transfer systems with a view to increasing the level of accountability and formality of such systems.

As remittances make their way home and contribute to family survival and economic development, it is worth underlining that the demand may pose a substantial drain on those who send them. Family and kinship links, while providing network support, are also a source of perhaps never ending obligations. Diaspora attitudes to the family back home may therefore be highly ambivalent. Sending remittances back home can be a large drain on the resources of those who have employment in the West, and even more so for those who do not. Such demands may work against the diaspora's social mobility in the host country and also make accumulating capital for return or broader investments back home very difficult. Susan Martin (2001b) has on a similar note asked if the remittances come at a cost to those settling abroad. What trade offs are migrants making to save sufficient resources to remit? Are they unable to make investments in education and skills upgrading in order to send all this money home? Are remittance expectations another form of debt bondage that takes over as soon as other migration costs are paid off? Development agencies should make sure that their renewed focus on diasporas and remittances as a source of development finance does not place additional stress on already vulnerable groups.

In relation to return and repatriation, policy makers should be aware that repatriation or tight restrictions on entry may have far-reaching consequences for the migration-development link. If the resolution of conflict is accompanied by large-scale repatriation, the source of remittances will obviously diminish, raising potential for renewed instability and further conflict. Moreover, the trend towards containment in countries or regions of origin will mean that those remaining in such places may have less in the way of earning and therefore less remittance power than those in more prosperous migration countries (Sørensen et al. 2003b).

As recently argued by Beryl Nicholson, many returnees return to developing countries ravaged by conflict. Since the benefits work migrants bring when they return are also those needed in the home countries of refugees, she advocates that refugees should be allowed to work and to obtain capital, skills and ideas for their return. She further argues that refugees should perhaps be given continuous permission to work abroad during an initial rebuilding phase, allowing them to contribute remittances to families who are otherwise dependent on international aid (Nicholson 2002). This line of thought seems worth pursuing.

Some return programmes have demanded returning families to stay, undivided and permanently, in the places of return. However, people who are living at the edge of the global economy may be unable to establish sustainable livelihoods without incorporating highly mobile strategies for gaining access to work, education and markets (for the case of Peru, see Stepputat & Sørensen 2001; for the case of Afghans, Palestinians and Sri Lankans, see Van Hear 2003). This pattern is repeated when we look at conventional repatriation policies. As the Somali case have shown, if return becomes a possibility, returnees may choose a 'staggered return' that allows them to develop a transnational livelihood, drawing on rights and resources from several places, including the country of origin and the countries of refuge.

So-called durable solutions are not bound to be either integration or repatriation but could well combine the two in durable transnational, transregional or translocal strategies in which dispersed social networks are acknowledged as important factors of political and economic development. 'Go-and-see' programmes for potentially repatriating refugees are a sign of an emerging awareness of the importance of transnational networks within humanitarian agencies. Other concrete measures to increase the development impact of migration could include maintaining flexible asylum and resettlement policies that relive pressure on poor first countries of asylum hosting refugees (burden sharing), and introducing flexible residence and citizenship rights to allow migrants to return home without prejudicing their right to stay in host countries. This measure seems particularly important in relation to migrants/refugees from countries evolving from violent conflict.

If class background, educational background, access to financial means and social networks, and gender determine destination, and destination in turn determines the development potential of a given diaspora, will diaspora networks and transnational transfers inevitably lead to greater socio-economic differentiation? Are there ways to link up those who started out better endowed in terms of resources and networks, who may return better educated, with better networks and resources they can call upon, with the poor who remain excluded from such networks? In other words, are there means of linking the poor with the better endowed in productive ways?

In subtle ways, state regulation in host societies – through immigration policy, citizenship, integration, labour market regulations, social welfare policies, and so forth – are related to the more implicit, micro-political forms of exclusion and inclusion in the everyday lives that shape the standing and status of the different, and hierarchically ordered, groups of transnational and regional diasporas and local populations. It should remain the prime objective of development policy to reduce poverty and make globalization work for all. From this point of departure,



attempts to align migration and development policies should focus on establishing more fair and effective migration and asylum approaches that do not, by definition, exclude the poor and unskilled from developing countries from access to regular migration opportunities and those in need of protection to be granted it.

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