

5. Global Somalia Diaspora (GSD)

Category: Diaspora and migrants' role in job creation, enterprise, investment and public policy

*Established in Istanbul in 2014, with offices in London, Minnesota and Mogadishu, GSD's aim is to harness the power of Somalia diaspora for the reconstruction of the country. **Abdihakim Ainte** is former policy advisor of the Office of Somalia Diaspora (ODA) at the ministry of foreign affairs in Somalia.*

Somalia's diaspora: turning the tide

The vast majority of Somalis in the west were the first generation to escape after the civil war in 1991, and some have become remarkable migrants. Take Ahmed Hussen*, a lawyer and community activist who was elected to Canadian parliament, or award-winning Kenyan-born Somali poet Warsan Shire, a Londoner who was recently featured in Beyonce's album.

It is diaspora figures like Sadia*, a hot sauce entrepreneur who moved to the US in 1999, whose investment is keeping Somalia's economy alive. Sadia gave 10% of her proceeds for aid during the Somali famine. Indeed, in almost every major city in the world, from Nairobi to Dubai via London, Melbourne or Cape Town, you can find small Somali shops, a business mentality which has earned Somalis the reputation of entrepreneurial nomads*.

In the UN and international aid community, the jargon about Somalis is that they are 'resilient'. For two decades, the 1.5 million-strong Somali diaspora threw the country a lifeline by wiring a few hundred dollars to families and relatives. With this money, families can foot basic bills such as food, rent or sending children to school. The largest diaspora members, who live in Europe and North America, send a whopping almost 2 billion USD dollar per year*, rendering them one of the largest remittance-sender diasporas in the world.

After two decades abroad, the rapid return of the diaspora to their homeland is primarily driven by two motives: to navigate their roots and identity, and to contribute to the ongoing reconstruction effort with the aim of exploring business opportunities and participating in public institutions. While there is no substantive data on how much of the diaspora has returned to Somalia, their impact on the ground is measurable and widely seen. The overwhelming majority of current cabinet, police and military have lived abroad, including the prime minister, who spent years in Canada. In civil society, the recently launched Fursad Fund* is the first independent trust fund initiative arranged by members of diaspora, with the support of locals.

There is also small-scale investment in real estate, restaurants, home delivery pizza, coffee shops, laundry, ICT sector and even fresh flowers via a florist*. As result, for the first time in two decades, the IMF* reviewed Somali economy with a 2.7% growth projection, a quantum leap for a country still struggling with political instability, weak institutions and recurrent droughts.

Links:

*<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/toronto-s-ahmed-hussen-1st-somali-canadian-elected-to-parliament-1.3281260>

*<http://sadiassauce.com/about-sadia/>

*<http://roguechiefs.com/2012/01/06/somalia-doesnt-have-to-fight-to-conquer-somalis-are-already-africas-small-kings-and-queens/>

*<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2012/feb/20/what-role-somalia-diaspora-rebuilding>

*<http://www.ibtimes.com/somalias-first-independent-trust-fund-offers-hope-unemployed-youth-raises-concerns-2328283>

* <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/01/somalia-first-florist-romance-mogadishu>

* <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2015/CAR072915B.htm>