

SOGEDO Assessment Report – Somaliland

Hargeisa, July 2024

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Acronyms:

SOGEDO - Somaliland Gender Equality Development Organization

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

ICT - Information and Communication Technology

IT - Information Technology

Fintech - Financial Technology

E-commerce - Electronic Commerce

Introduction:

As a non-profit, non-governmental organization based in Hargeisa, Somaliland, SOGEDO has been steadfastly championing the interests of women and empowerment of the Somaliland diaspora community. SOGEDO's core mission revolves around facilitating the reintegration of diaspora members, promoting investment and entrepreneurship, and advocating for the rights and welfare of this vibrant community.

In pursuit of this mandate, SOGEDO recently conducted a comprehensive assessment to delve into the demographics, challenges, needs, and opportunities facing the Somaliland diaspora through Voluntary repatriation project. The primary objectives of this endeavor were twofold: to gain a deeper understanding of the diaspora's profiles, motivations, and experiences, and to leverage these insights to refine SOGEDO's programs and initiatives in order to better serve this dynamic community.

Methodology:

The SOGEDO assessment team employed a rigorous, multi-pronged approach, blending qualitative research method to capture a holistic view of the Somaliland diaspora landscape. The data-gathering exercise spanned a two-weeks period in July 2024, during which the team conducted in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with a diverse range of stakeholders.

Interviews:

Ten comprehensive interviews were carried out, engaging the following key informants:

1. Government representatives: to gain an understanding of the policy landscape and support mechanisms in place for the diaspora community.
2. Migration authorities: to collect data on the trends and patterns surrounding the return of diaspora members to Somaliland.
3. Diaspora members: to garner firsthand perspectives on the challenges, needs, and lived experiences of the diaspora.
4. Agencies for refugees and displaced persons: to explore the support available for diaspora members facing vulnerable situations.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing for in-depth exploration of the research objectives while providing flexibility for the respondents to share their unique insights and experiences. The assessment team employed active listening techniques and probing questions to elicit rich, nuanced data from the key informants.

Focus Group Discussions:

To delve deeper into the nuances of the diaspora experience, the assessment team organized four focused group discussions with the following stakeholder segments:

1. Diaspora members: to unpack their motivations, challenges, and aspirations for returning to Somaliland.
2. Business diaspora: to understand the investment and entrepreneurial activities undertaken by the diaspora community.

3. Resettled diaspora members: to gain insights into the reintegration process and the support required for a seamless transition.

The focus group discussions were facilitated by experienced moderators, who employed a mix of open-ended questions, interactive exercises, and group dynamics to encourage robust dialogue and the exchange of diverse perspectives among the participants.

Data Analysis:

The qualitative data collected through the interviews and focus group discussions was subjected to a rigorous thematic analysis. The assessment team utilized a coding framework to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights, which were then synthesized to uncover the key findings. Quantitative data, such as demographic information and investment trends, was analyzed using statistical software to generate descriptive statistics and visualizations.

Findings:

Demographic Profile of Diaspora Returnees:

The SOGEDO assessment unveils a diverse and dynamic demographic profile of the Somaliland diaspora returnees.

Gender:

The gender distribution among the returnees was relatively balanced, with an equal representation of both male and female diaspora members.

Age:

The majority of the diaspora returnees fell within the 25-45 age range, indicating a prime working-age population. However, the assessment also captured a significant number of young adults (18-25 years) and older adults (45-65 years) in the diaspora community.

Educational Background:

The educational attainment of the diaspora returnees spanned a wide spectrum, from secondary education to advanced degrees. This diversity of educational backgrounds underscores the wealth of human capital within the Somaliland diaspora.

Occupational Background:

The diaspora members hailed from a diverse array of professional backgrounds, including business, healthcare, education, technology, and various skilled trades. This breadth of expertise and experience presents immense potential for the diaspora to contribute to Somaliland's development across multiple sectors.

Challenges Faced by the Diaspora:

The SOGEDO assessment revealed a multitude of challenges confronting the Somaliland diaspora, which have the potential to hamper their reintegration and limit their contributions to the country's development.

One of the primary concerns voiced by the diaspora was the limited access to investment opportunities and capital. Aspiring entrepreneurs among the diaspora often struggle to secure the necessary financing and navigate the complex regulatory environment, hindering their ability to turn their business ideas

into reality. This challenge was further exacerbated by the perceived lack of transparency and efficiency in the country's financial systems.

Closely tied to this challenge is the inadequate support for reintegration. Many diaspora members reported difficulties in finding suitable employment, securing affordable housing, and accessing essential social services upon their return to Somaliland. This lack of a robust support system can undermine their sense of belonging and impede their efforts to settle back into their homeland.

Furthermore, the diaspora highlighted the bureaucratic and legal hurdles they face when attempting to establish their businesses or engage in various economic activities. The time-consuming and often opaque processes involved in obtaining permits, registrations, and other legal requirements can be a significant barrier to their participation in Somaliland's economy.

The assessment also shed light on the diaspora's struggle to establish social and professional networks within Somaliland. Feeling isolated and disconnected from the local community, many diaspora members find it challenging to tap into employment opportunities or collaborate on business ventures.

Lastly, the diaspora cited the sociocultural adjustments as a notable challenge. For example, different languages and educational systems are a key barrier for their children's integration into the society. For those who have spent an extended period abroad, adapting to the societal norms, expectations, and cultural nuances of Somaliland was described as a daunting task, potentially hindering their full integration.

Needs of the Diaspora:

The SOGEDO assessment uncovered a diverse array of needs expressed by the Somaliland diaspora, which span both business-related and broader social and personal domains.

Business-related Needs:

On the business front, the diaspora members articulated a strong desire for improved access to financing options. They highlighted the need for readily available loans, grants, and investment funds to support their entrepreneurial endeavors and unlock their full potential as drivers of economic growth.

In tandem with the need for capital, the diaspora also voiced a demand for comprehensive business development support. This includes access to mentorship programs, training opportunities, and advisory services to help them navigate the local business environment and establish sustainable enterprises.

Furthermore, the diaspora expressed a need for regulatory and legal guidance. They seek support in understanding and complying with the various policies, tax regimes, and legal requirements governing business operations in Somaliland, thereby reducing the administrative and compliance-related challenges they face.

Other Needs:

Beyond the business realm, the diaspora also highlighted pressing needs in the realms of housing, social services, and employment opportunities.

Many diaspora members returning to Somaliland require assistance in securing affordable and suitable housing, as well as accessing essential social services such as healthcare, education, and social welfare

programs. The availability and accessibility of these basic amenities and support systems are crucial for a successful reintegration experience.

Additionally, the diaspora expressed a strong need for meaningful employment opportunities that align with their skills, experience, and career aspirations. This is particularly important for those with specialized expertise, as they seek to contribute their knowledge and capabilities to the development of Somaliland.

Lastly, the diaspora underscored the importance of building professional and social networks within Somaliland. They highlighted the need for platforms and initiatives that facilitate the creation of connections, collaborations, and a sense of belonging within the local community.

Reasons for Returning to Somaliland:

The SOGEDO assessment revealed that the Somaliland diaspora's motivations for returning to their homeland extended beyond just patriotism and the desire to contribute. Many diaspora members also cited experiences of racism and cultural alienation in their countries of residence as driving factors behind their decision to repatriate.

Some returnees expressed concerns about the growing prevalence of youth crime and gang activity in European cities, fearing for the well-being and future of their children. Additionally, the perceived erosion of traditional values and the rise of "woke" cultural shifts in parts of Europe further compelled certain diaspora members to seek a more familiar and comfortable environment in Somaliland, where they could reconnect with their roots and ensure their families' well-being.

In addition, the assessment uncovered several compelling reasons that have motivated the Somaliland diaspora to return to their homeland.

Patriotism and the Desire to Contribute:

A significant proportion of the diaspora returnees expressed a strong sense of patriotism and a fervent desire to apply their skills and experiences to the betterment of Somaliland. They felt a deep calling to be part of the country's continued development and progress.

Improved Political and Economic Stability:

The relative political and economic stability that Somaliland has experienced in recent years has served as a pull factor for some diaspora members, encouraging them to explore the growing opportunities within their homeland.

Family and Social Ties:

For many diaspora returnees, the pull of family, cultural, and social connections to Somaliland was a critical factor in their decision to repatriate. The desire to reconnect with their roots and contribute to their local communities was a driving force.

Retirement and Investment Opportunities:

A smaller segment of the diaspora returnees were retirees or individuals seeking to invest in Somaliland's real estate, agriculture, or other promising sectors, leveraging their accumulated wealth and experience.

Skills and Investments of the Diaspora:

The Somaliland diaspora returnees possess a diverse range of skills and expertise that can contribute significantly to the country's development.

In the realm of business and entrepreneurship, the diaspora members have honed their acumen, having gained valuable experience in establishing and growing enterprises in their host countries. Their specialized knowledge of market trends, financial management, and innovative business strategies can be instrumental in catalyzing Somaliland's private sector growth.

The healthcare and medical professions are another area where the diaspora shines. With trained physicians, nurses, and allied health professionals among their ranks, the diaspora can contribute immensely to strengthening Somaliland's healthcare system, introducing new medical practices, and improving the overall well-being of the population.

The education and training sector also stands to benefit from the diaspora's expertise. Former teachers, academics, and educational administrators can share their pedagogical skills and help modernize Somaliland's educational institutions, elevating the quality of learning and the development of human capital.

In the fast-evolving digital age, the diaspora's proficiency in information technology and digital services is a valuable asset. Their knowledge of cutting-edge technologies, software development, and data analytics can drive the country's digital transformation and foster innovation in sectors ranging from e-commerce to fintech.

The diaspora's technical prowess extends to the fields of engineering and construction as well. With experienced civil, structural, and mechanical engineers, the diaspora can contribute their expertise to the much-needed infrastructure development projects in Somaliland, from building affordable housing to modernizing transportation networks.

Skills and Expertise:

The assessment revealed that the diaspora members have specialized skills and knowledge in various sectors, including:

- Business and entrepreneurship
- Healthcare and medical professions
- Education and training
- Information technology and digital services
- Engineering and construction
- Agriculture and food production

Investments and Engagements:

Upon their return to Somaliland, the diaspora members have invested their resources and expertise in a wide array of sectors, such as:

- Real estate and construction

- Retail and hospitality
- Agriculture and food processing
- Information and communication technology
- Healthcare and education services

Key Opportunities in Somaliland:

The SOGEDO assessment has identified several key areas of opportunity for the Somaliland diaspora in the major cities of Hargeisa and Burao.

Infrastructure Development:

The growing demand for housing, transportation, and public utilities in Somaliland presents significant opportunities for diaspora investment and the application of their technical expertise.

Entrepreneurship and Small Business:

The relatively untapped markets in various sectors, including tourism, renewable energy, and specialty consumer goods, offer promising entrepreneurial prospects for the diaspora community. Capital

Development:

The need for skilled professionals in critical sectors like healthcare, education, and technology creates valuable openings for diaspora members to contribute their specialized knowledge and experience.

Agribusiness and Food Production:

Somaliland's agricultural potential, combined with the expanding domestic and regional demand for food products, presents investment and business opportunities for the diaspora.

Financial Services and Fintech:

The expanding financial sector and the increasing adoption of digital financial solutions provide opportunities for the diaspora to engage in the development of innovative financial products and services.

Recommendations:

Solutions to Support the Diaspora:

Based on the findings of the assessment, SOGEDO has formulated a set of recommendations to better support the Somaliland diaspora community.

Establish a Dedicated Diaspora Investment Fund:

SOGEDO proposes the creation of a specialized investment fund that will provide the diaspora with access to affordable financing options, including loans, grants, and venture capital. This will empower the diaspora to overcome the hurdle of limited access to capital and unleash their entrepreneurial potential.

Enhance the Business Development Support Ecosystem:

SOGEDO recommends the implementation of a comprehensive business development support system that offers services such as business incubation, mentorship programs, and regulatory guidance. This will equip the diaspora with the necessary tools and knowledge to establish and grow their enterprises in Somaliland.

Streamline Bureaucratic and Legal Processes:

SOGEDO advocates for the simplification and streamlining of administrative and legal procedures governing business operations, investment activities, and other engagements by the diaspora. This will help reduce the barriers and bottlenecks they face, enabling a more seamless integration into Somaliland's economy.

Facilitate Social and Professional Integration:

SOGEDO proposes the creation of platforms and initiatives that foster the development of social and professional networks for the diaspora. These could include job matching services, networking events, and community-building programs to help the diaspora members establish connections and find meaningful employment opportunities.

Strengthen the Diaspora Engagement Strategy:

SOGEDO recommends the development of a strategic, multi-faceted approach to engaging the diaspora community. This may include targeted outreach initiatives, dedicated communication channels, and mechanisms to recognize and celebrate the diaspora's contributions to Somaliland's development.

Areas for Further Investment and Opportunities:

The SOGEDO assessment has identified several key areas that present promising investment and engagement opportunities for the Somaliland diaspora.

Infrastructure Development:

SOGEDO encourages the diaspora to explore investment opportunities in the construction of affordable housing, transportation networks, and public utilities to address the growing infrastructure needs in Somaliland.

Agribusiness and Food Production:

SOGEDO sees immense potential for the diaspora to contribute their expertise and capital towards modernizing agricultural practices, enhancing food processing capabilities, and strengthening the overall agricultural value chain in Somaliland.

Information and Communication Technology:

SOGEDO recommends that the diaspora leverage their knowledge and skills to participate in the development of Somaliland's digital economy, including the creation of fintech solutions, e-commerce platforms, and IT service offerings.

Healthcare and Education:

SOGEDO recognizes the diaspora's ability to bolster the healthcare and education systems in Somaliland through the transfer of their professional expertise and the establishment of specialized services and facilities.

Renewable Energy:

SOGEDO encourages the diaspora to capitalize on their experience in renewable energy technologies to contribute to Somaliland's sustainable development and the diversification of its energy mix.

Diaspora Contributions and Information Channels:

SOGEDO envisions the Somaliland diaspora playing a multifaceted role in the country's progress, leveraging their skills, resources, and connections to drive positive change.

Knowledge Transfer and Capacity Building:

SOGEDO proposes that the diaspora actively engage in mentorship programs, training initiatives, and collaborative projects to share their expertise and experience, thereby enhancing the capabilities of the local workforce and strengthening institutional capacities.

Advocacy and Policy Influence:

SOGEDO encourages the diaspora to leverage their collective voice and influence to advocate for policies and initiatives that address their needs and contribute to the overall development of Somaliland.

Philanthropic and Social Impact Initiatives:

SOGEDO aims to facilitate the diaspora's involvement in charitable, community-based, and social impact projects that address pressing social and economic challenges in Somaliland.

Effective Communication and Information Dissemination:

SOGEDO will establish dedicated communication channels, such as a diaspora portal, newsletters, and social media platforms, to ensure that the diaspora community is well-informed about the opportunities, policies, and support available in Somaliland.

Conclusion:

The SOGEDO assessment has provided invaluable insights into the Somaliland diaspora, shedding light on their demographic profiles, motivations, challenges, needs, and the myriad opportunities that await them in their homeland. These findings underscore the immense potential of the diaspora community to drive the country's development and prosperity.

By addressing the identified challenges and implementing the recommended solutions, SOGEDO, in collaboration with the Somaliland umbrella in Sweden, Sweden government and other stakeholders, can create an enabling environment that empowers the diaspora and harnesses their skills, expertise, and resources for the betterment of the nation. Through strategic interventions and a robust diaspora engagement strategy, Somaliland can unleash the transformative power of its diaspora and chart a course towards a more vibrant, inclusive, and prosperous future.

Annex: