

Diaspora as a Development and Peace Building Actor in the Horn of Africa?

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Research on transnational life of Somalis has been carried out in recent years, but most of this research focuses on the individual level. Previous research has stated the importance of financial remittances to families in Somalia/ Somaliland, but much less has been written on the collective activities of Somali diaspora. This paper will focus on the collective activities of Somalis by examining those Somali associations in Finland that are involved in development activities in the country of origin. Diaspora associations are important actors through which images of community and culture are produced and disseminated, as well as agents who pool resources and are therefore potentially important actors in the development work. The modes of engagement for the diaspora are however framed both by prevailing contexts in the countries of settlement and of origin.

In this paper I will study the associational field of Somalis in Finland first by looking at the modes of functioning and principles of organisation. I am particularly interested in the context in which the associations are functioning in terms of available resources, interaction with state actors and the challenges they face in their work. Second, I will describe what kind of contributions diaspora organisations make to their country of origin. Third, I will discuss how the conflict and post-conflict contexts in Somalia and Somaliland shape the opportunities for diaspora organisations' activities. This paper is based on the empirical data (31 semi-structured interviews with Somalis in Finland and observations in associations' activities, seminars etc.) gathered between 2008-2010 in several fieldwork periods in the metropolitan area of Finland.