

U of M researchers call for US government to expand role in helping rebuild Somalia

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Research illustrates the need for better infrastructure in Somalia. Credit: COSV [CC BY-SA 3.0]

As Somalia continues to rebuild after a prolonged civil war that began in the early 1990s, researchers at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs recommend the U.S. government shift its work from peacekeeping to rebuilding in ways that will help grow Somalia's

economy. As the country began to stabilize, many members of the diaspora who had fled during the unrest returned to Somalia with ideas on how to start businesses and help grow the economy. Despite a deep desire to help, the Somali diaspora reported considerable barriers to their work, and researchers have identified several ways the U.S. government and nonprofit or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) could help create better opportunities for growth and stability.

"Tremendous investments made by the U.S. and governments of other countries have helped create a more safe and stable environment in Somalia, and it's time to take the next steps," Humphrey School of Public Affairs Associate Professor Ryan Allen, who conducted the study with Associate Professor Carissa Slotterback. "Without investments in infrastructure—roads and sewer systems, medical clinics, and schools—it will be hard to help get the economy on better footing, and the U.S. should consider joining other nations currently offering that kind of support."

In a unique collaboration involving the Humphrey School, the Peace Research Institute Oslo in Norway and The Heritage Institute in Mogadishu, Somalia, researchers conducted 80 interviews with members of the Somali diaspora who had made a return trip to Somalia and gained deep insights into the personal experiences and observations of the return migrants. While in Somalia, many worked in government or civil society sectors including health care and education. They also attempted to share ideas and experiences from their time in the U.S. in ways that could impact Somalia's long-term success, such as leadership. Of Somali-Americans living in the Twin Cities of Minnesota who made a return trip, the vast majority stayed in Somalia for less than a year and returned to their jobs and families in Minnesota.

Research findings suggest a series of policy considerations for U.S. government and civil society institutions:

- Vigorously support programs that provide short-term returns of highly skilled members of the Somali diaspora to Somalia for development efforts
- Provide access to sources of venture capital to support entrepreneurs from the diaspora who would like to open businesses in Somalia
- Under the auspices of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and aid organizations in Somalia, help improve relations between returning members of the diaspora and non-diaspora who live in Somalia
- Increase support of such infrastructure projects as roads, health clinics, and water sanitation systems to improve the quality of life and increase potential for economic growth
- Expand partnerships with local government offices and civil society institutions in the Twin Cities to deepen opportunities for diaspora to engage in Somalia

With an estimated 30,000 Somali refugees living in Minnesota, the Twin Cities has the largest Somali population outside of Africa. When [civil war](#) forced them to flee Somalia in the early 1990s, thousands also settled in Norway.

Allen says, "There is a lot of work to be done in Somalia, and there are many members of the diaspora who feel a deep sense of loyalty and commitment to helping their homeland, but they need the U.S. government to not only back their efforts, but create ways to help them do the work."

The project was funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and nearly all of the interviews were conducted by members of the Somali diaspora during the summers of 2013 and 2014. In the fall of 2014, researchers from Oslo and Mogadishu joined the Humphrey School team in presenting their findings to various U.S. entities

including the State Department, the National Security Council, USAID, and a variety of refugee serving non-governmental organizations.

More information: www.hhh.umn.edu/features/pdf/PolicyReportFinal.pdf

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