

Aiding refugees during South-South migration: examining Syrian diaspora assistance to Syrian forced migrants

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Introduction

The Syrian conflict has produced one of the largest humanitarian crises since World War II. The United Nations estimates that there are over 5.1 million registered refugees who have fled Syria, 6.3 million people who have been internally displaced, and 13.5 million people who are considered to be in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria (UNHCR, 2017a). The media has given substantial attention to the experiences of Syrian refugees migrating to Europe, and the experiences of European societies as they absorb these migrants. Relatively less attention has been given to the experience of Syrian refugees migrating to countries of the global South, and the ability of these countries to host migrants. This inattention exists in spite of the fact that the United Nations estimates that more than 4.8 million Syrian refugees have been displaced to neighboring countries in the global South such as Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey (UNHCR, 2017b). As of 2017, Syria is the country of origin of more refugees than any other country on Earth (UNHCR, 2017c).

Syrian refugees who are able to migrate to European Union member states are often comparatively better off than other refugees. Though their suffering should not be underestimated, Syrian migrants arriving in the European Union often are somewhat more affluent, and less vulnerable, than the would-be migrants who remain behind in the Middle East region. Migrants to Europe Union member states are more likely to find themselves arriving in states with comparatively well-developed welfare systems, and with legal frameworks that allow for the integration of refugees. In contrast, internally displaced persons inside Syria, or refugees who migrate to geographically proximal countries

such as Iraq, Lebanon, and Turkey, are often less affluent and more vulnerable. Syrian migrants to neighboring Southern countries often lack the funds to travel to the European Union, or as mothers, young children, elderly, sick, or persons with a disability, they are unable to make the long and dangerous journey north. These Syrian forced migrants settle in countries of the global South that often have weak social welfare systems, limited human services infrastructure, and legal frameworks that actively prevent the incorporation of migrant communities.

This paper examines the advantages Syrian diaspora nonprofit organizations have in providing aid to Syrians who migrate to other destinations in the global South. Based on interviews with leaders of four diaspora organizations providing aid to forced migrants in Lebanon, Turkey, and inside Syria, this paper addresses several unique advantages that Syrian diaspora members can bring to the table when working to aid migrants. Among these are:

- strong motivation based on deep personal ties, which cause diaspora members to be more resilient and less risk averse when working in difficult contexts
- cultural competence and familiarity that make diaspora members more adept at navigating complex legal and operational environments
- an ability to make use of informal accountability mechanisms that derive from their social network ties, which assist in identifying trustworthy partners and effective processes for providing aid

There are unique advantages that come to the fore when voluntary or economic migrants, like many Syrian diaspora members, organize themselves to provide aid to forced migrants from Syria. These benefits are particularly useful as Syrians migrate from Syria to other countries of the global South. South-South migration can pose more logistical challenges for aid due to limited infrastructure and legal barriers in the host country environment. Diaspora actors may be especially sympathetic to

these challenges, and have an ability to navigate barriers in ways that are less familiar to those who are not diaspora members.

South-South migration in the Syrian crisis

Emigration from Syria has a long history, but in the present day attention is focused on the refugee crisis prompted by the Syrian civil war, an ever-evolving multi-party conflict that initially began with the Arab Spring protests in early 2011. As of August 2017, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees estimated that more than 5.1 million refugees had fled Syria, with more than 4.8 million Syrian refugees displaced to countries in the global South including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey (UNHCR, 2017b). Data for this paper focuses on diaspora aid efforts in Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey. Over 1 million displaced Syrians reside in Lebanon, and more than 3.1 million reside in Turkey (UNHCR, 2017c). Meanwhile 13.5 million people are considered to be in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria, with 6.3 million people internally displaced from their homes (UNHCR, 2017a).

With a population estimated at only 4.6 million in 2012 (United Nations, 2015)¹, Lebanon is one of the smallest host countries in the Middle East. “No country in recent memory has taken on more refugees proportional to its size,” states UNHCR Representative to Lebanon, Ninette Kelley (UNHCR 2014, p. 3). As of 2017 Lebanon hosts the third largest number of refugees in the world, at over one million (UNHCR, 2017d). It should be noted that in May 2015 the Government of Lebanon requested that the United Nations suspend registration of new Syrian arrivals (UNHCR, 2017c), so the number of Syrian forced migrants in the country undoubtedly exceeds this figure. Many towns and villages in Lebanon are home to more Syrian refugees than Lebanese, with refugees living in more than 2,100

¹ A population figure from 2012 is used because current CIA World Fact Book figures put the population of Lebanon at 6.2 million people, a figure that almost certainly includes the Syrian refugee population that has arrived since 2011.

communities (UNHCR, 2017a) and more than 1,400 informal refugee settlements² (UNHCR 2015). Beleaguered by years of civil war, continuing sectarian conflict, and political deadlocks that disrupt government services³, infrastructure in Lebanon was already weak prior to the Syrian conflict. The arrival of a large and vulnerable refugee population has created even greater pressure on existing service systems (UNHCR 2014). Seventy percent of Syrian forced migrants to Lebanon live below the poverty line, and because formal refugee camps and permanent shelter for refugees are illegal in Lebanon, migrants often live in overcrowded and substandard conditions (UNHCR, 2017a.)

Turkey currently hosts more refugees than any other country in the world (UNHCR, 2017d). Though Turkey is a larger and wealthier country than Lebanon, Syrian refugees face many trials there as well. The Turkish government assumed the Syrian conflict would resolve quickly when it first initiated its “open-door” policy toward Syrian refugees, but has become less able to handle the long-term challenges of aiding 3.1 million people. Initially most refugees resided in camps managed by the Turkish state and NGOs, which were regarded as high quality. However, as the conflict continues many refugees have become urban dwellers, taking shelter at their own expense in cities, yet unable to work in the formal economy due to a lack of work permits (İçduygu, 2015). In 2017, twenty-one government-run refugee camps housed 260,000 Syrian refugees in Turkey (UNCHR, 2017a), with the remaining 2.8 million migrants seeking shelter elsewhere. In Turkey, the language barrier faced by Syrian refugees hinders integration and success in the local educational and economic systems, and recent political upheavals such as an attempted coup in summer 2016 create instability that could further threaten Syrian migrants’ status in the country⁴. In both Lebanon and Turkey, local community relations are strained by

² Because the Lebanese government does not recognize displaced Syrians as formal refugees (International Rescue Committee 2015), formal refugee camps operated by UNHCR or other humanitarian organizations do not exist. However, many hundreds of informal tent settlements have been created by refugees around the country.

³ An example would be the infamous 2015 garbage crisis in Lebanon. See for example Stel and el-Husseini (2015).

⁴ See for example Kingsley’s article “‘We feared the worst’ - Turkey’s failed coup a relief for Syrian refugees.”

growing grievances against Syrians, who are viewed as taking jobs from locals, increasing housing costs and creating housing shortages, and contributing to political instability (İçduygu 2015).

Inside Syria, 6.3 million people have been internally displaced, and 13.5 million people are considered to be in need of humanitarian assistance (UNHCR, 2017a). Further complicating the aid environment, 4.9 million people live in what the United Nations deems hard-to-reach and besieged areas without regular access to humanitarian assistance (UNHCR, 2016). The conflict between the Syrian regime and various rebel groups, as well as among rebel groups including ISIS, has pushed millions of Syrians away from war-affected areas to safer areas, often only to be forced to move again as the conflict shifts. Both the violent conflict and large influxes of internally displaced individuals put tremendous pressure on often-destroyed infrastructure, as well as on service delivery organizations. In 2016 in Syria 58% of public hospitals and 49% of public health center were either only partially functional or closed. Shelter is a major challenge for residents, with 1.6 million housing units damaged or destroyed and 4.6 million people in need of shelter assistance (UNHCR, 2016). Attacks on civilian infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, parks, water networks, places of worship, and economic assets (UNICEF, 2016) have increased the need for services, but also increase the risk to international organizations that attempt to deliver services. In Syria, risk of collateral damage to aid personnel from gunfire, rockets and mortars, improvised explosive devices, and increased risk of kidnapping persisted through 2016 (UNHCR 2016). Among the organizations working to serve individuals inside Syria and Syrian refugees abroad are Syrian diaspora nonprofit organizations, funded and operated by individuals of Syrian ancestry in Europe, the Middle East, North America, and elsewhere.

Review of Literature on Diaspora Philanthropy

Diasporas are “ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin—their homelands,” (Sheffer, 1986, p. 3). For the purposes of this paper, diaspora philanthropy is defined as money, goods,

volunteer labor, knowledge and skills, and other assets donated for the social benefit of a community broader than ones' family members, in a country or region where there is a population with whom the donor(s) have ancestral ties. The focus on populations with whom the donor(s) has ancestral ties as opposed to merely geographic locations where donors have ancestral roots is intentional, as this allows one to consider, for example, Syrians in Dubai giving to conflict-displaced Syrians in Lebanon or Syrians in Canada giving to conflict-displaced Syrians in Turkey.

There are many reasons members of diaspora groups may feel drawn to engage in philanthropy toward those with whom they share ancestral ties. Awareness of and emotional ties to shared homeland, language, and culture are often central to diaspora identity. Concern for the predicament of other diaspora members in the homeland or elsewhere is a result of this emotional investment (Best et al. 2013, Brinkerhoff 2008, Brinkerhoff 2011). Werbner (2002) calls diasporas deterritorialized communities that view their members as having a shared destiny in spite of being geographically dispersed. Philanthropy becomes a vital aspect of expressing diaspora membership, as contributing goods across national borders is a means of proving one's connection to a global diaspora community (Brinkerhoff 2011, Nielsen & Riddle 2009, Werbner 2002). Diaspora members also may feel an obligation to give due to their comparatively higher wealth or quality of life in their country of residence (Brinkerhoff 2008, 2011). Philanthropy may also be a function of cultural obligations, since diaspora members may socialize their children to abide by culture norms wherein social needs are provided mostly by the family, clan, or ethnic group (Brinkerhoff 2011. Tchouassi and Sikod, 2010).

There is great interest in diaspora groups' potential to contribute to development and peacebuilding in their countries of origin in the international development policy arena (Rahman 2011). However, empirical research on the topic remains sparse. Literature on the development impact of diasporas emphasizes remittances, business investing, and business networks (Brinkerhoff 2009, Chacko & Gebre 2013, Gillespie et al. 1999, Gillespie et al 2001, Leblang 2010, Lowell and De la Garza 2000,

Mehrez & Hamdy 2010, Mohan 2002, Mullings 2011, Mutume 2005, Newland & Tanaka 2010, Nielsen & Riddle 2010, Nyberg-Sorensen et al. 2002, Özden & Schiff, 2005, Page & Plaza 2006, Sikod & Tchouassi 2007, Newland & Patrick 2004, Riddle et al. 2008, Tchouassi & Sikod 2010). Research on the philanthropic and social aid activities of diaspora communities is limited enough that Brinkerhoff (2014) describes the field as in its infancy, and Johnson (2007) describes it as one of the least understood subfields of philanthropic practice.

Mechanisms of diaspora philanthropy

Scholars have an emerging sense of some of the mechanisms that facilitate diaspora philanthropy. Philanthropic contributions are a vital but difficult to disaggregate component of remittances, which are beginning to be studied in more detail (see for example Orozco 2001, Özden & Schiff 2005, Page & Plaza 2006, Sidel 2008, Sikod & Tchouassi 2007, Tchouassi & Sikod 2010). Family channels and clan associations are important mechanisms for transmitting funds (Sidel 2008, Tchouassi & Sikod 2010). Philanthropic intermediaries typically help middle and lower income diaspora members target assistance to causes in the country of origin, since a lack of time, resources, and relevant skills make it challenging to develop projects individually (Newland et al. 2010, Sidel 2008). Diaspora philanthropy occurs through a broad spectrum of intermediaries that includes ethnic and professional groups, neighborhood and regional groups, hometown associations, online giving platforms, faith based organizations, diaspora foundations, and foreign-based ethnic NGOs, among others (Newland et al. 2010, Sidel 2008).

Aside from remittances, the most studied mechanism of diaspora philanthropy is hometown associations, which are particularly well-understood in terms of financial flows to Mexico (Newland & Patrick 2004). Migrants from a single town in Mexico often settle in the same community in the United States, and individuals in the United States assemble small contributions to support health, education,

job creation, infrastructure, sports, or other projects in their home village or town (Merz 2005, Orozco 2001, Orozco 2003, Orozco 2004, Rabadán et al. 2011). Similar associations have been found to operate in Bangladesh (Brinkerhoff 2008), the Philippines (Sidel 2008), and countries in Central Africa (Tchouassi & Sikod 2010).

Advantages of diaspora philanthropy in South-South migration

The international aid community has developed an interest in diaspora philanthropy due to the comparative advantages diaspora members may bring as they become involved in aid to their fellow diaspora members. Members of diaspora communities have an emotional and social commitment to their fellow diaspora members that may make them more willing to direct philanthropy toward locations that are not often targeted by other aid organizations, or more willing to endure despite complications and obstacles in the operating environment (Brinkerhoff 2014). In fact, challenging conditions may serve as a motivator for some donors, particularly since diaspora members are aware that their families and communities in the country of origin may increasingly rely on diaspora aid during challenging times (Brinkerhoff 2004, 2008, Lubkemann 2008). Diaspora members also are believed to have an enhanced understanding of local needs and strategies to address them when compared with non-diaspora actors (Johnson 2007, Newland & Patrick 2004). Because diaspora members may be more aware of and acquainted with local organizations, in particular faith-based organizations, diaspora philanthropy is thought to have the potential to reach underserved locations or assist with crises that the international community may be challenged to address (Brinkerhoff 2008, 2011). Diaspora members may be especially skilled at evaluating potential partners, may be perceived as more trustworthy by local partners, and may have tools to implement agreements even in places where legal systems are fragile (Brinkerhoff 2011, Newland & Patrick 2004). Diasporans' direct experience and greater cultural competency may lead to better and more nuanced understanding of the local context, which in turn generates better decisions (Brinkerhoff 2011).

In addition to financial and other tangible resources, scholars also discuss “social remittances” that move between diaspora members and communities where diaspora aid occurs, such as ideas, behaviors, and social capital (Levitt, 1998). Diaspora members often have hybrid identities that integrate norms from their countries of residence and countries of origin, which may make diaspora members more willing to engage with matters that are divisive locally, such as gender equality, human rights, or the use of violence in conflict resolution (Al-Ali et al. 1999, Brinkerhoff 2009, Brinkerhoff 2011, Johnson 2007). As Johnson (2007) notes, “With the buffer of distance, diaspora giving may be more able and willing to address more ‘controversial issues’ than local philanthropy” (p. 14).

As Brinkerhoff (2014) notes, there is an evolving belief that diaspora philanthropy may have the potential to address needs and populations that often are excluded from the “global giving landscape” (p. 2.) Diaspora communities offer resources and perspectives that can give voice to needs typically overlooked within the international humanitarian aid community (Brinkerhoff 2011).

Drawbacks and challenges of diaspora philanthropy

Despite its promise, diaspora philanthropy is not without drawbacks and should not be thought of as a panacea in efforts to assist forced migrants (Bains 2014; Brinkerhoff 2008, 2011; Newland et al. 2010; Newland & Patrick 2004; Orjuela 2008; Østergaard-Nielsen 2006; Shain 2002; Shain & Barth 2003; Van Hear et al. 2010; Vertovec 2004; Wayland 2004). While there seem to be many benefits offered by diaspora philanthropy, challenges abound. Diaspora members may be comparatively wealthier than their country of origin counterparts (Brinkerhoff 2014), but these individuals often are struggling to adapt to new, more expensive societies and cannot alone bear the financial costs of larger-scale aid efforts (Brinkerhoff 2011). Scholars warn that country of origin governments may be tempted to renounce their obligation to address humanitarian crises and instead rely on diaspora philanthropy and

remittances, even though diaspora investments alone cannot solve major social ills (Brinkerhoff 2011, Vertovec 2004).

Governments' tolerance for diaspora efforts may vary widely. Views of diaspora communities can diverge based on motives for migration; for example, economic migrants may be regarded as less threatening than political or conflict-driven refugees (Shain 2002). Country of origin governments may perceive diaspora activities as partisan or as competition for legitimacy (Brinkerhoff 2011), and may be especially apprehensive about diaspora groups that act on behalf of minority interests (Shain & Barth 2003). Smaller-scale, volunteer-based efforts by diaspora communities often are accepted (Brinkerhoff 2011), but as diasporas create formal organizations and professionalize, country of origin governments may see diaspora groups as political threats or as rivals for donor funds. Brinkerhoff suggests a continuum of acceptance where small, amateur diaspora projects are accepted, but as diasporans become larger, more professionalized, and likely more effective, they become more likely to be perceived as threatening (Brinkerhoff 2011).

The types of small-scale amateur activities governments are more disposed to tolerate pose challenges in and of themselves. Priorities of diaspora donors and beneficiaries may not align, in spite of a belief that diaspora members may understand local needs better than other donors. This disconnect between perceptions of need among diaspora members and the community can hinder effectiveness and harm local partnerships (Newland et al. 2010). Diaspora projects may be characterized by philanthropic amateurism (Salamon 1995), meaning largely volunteer efforts by individuals who lack appropriate specialized training or are inexperienced with professionalized systems for providing services. These well-intended but less professional efforts can result in ineffective programs or inefficient use of resources.

Social equity concerns can arise in diaspora philanthropy due to challenges in connecting with appropriate target populations. The most vulnerable populations are often least likely to have connections to the diaspora; because the practice of diaspora philanthropy often relies on friend and family networks, there is no guarantee that funds will reach those most in need (Bains 2014, Brinkerhoff 2008). Philanthropic efforts often are characterized by philanthropic particularism, a desire to help the donor's own ethnic, religious, or geographic group. This may lead to a lack of services and resources in some communities, and duplication in others (Salamon 1995). Since diaspora communities are especially prone to show interest solely or primarily in their own group or region, socio-economic inequality can be further exacerbated (Van Hear et al. 2010).

Finally, there is plentiful evidence that in some instances, diaspora members from conflict zones actively contribute to violent conflict in their countries of origin (Newland & Patrick 2004, Orjuela 2008, Østergaard-Nielsen 2006, Shain 2002, Van Hear et al. 2010, Wayland 2004). Diaspora members offer support to combatants in the form of weapons, personnel, skills, and money in nearly all world regions (Newland & Patrick 2004, Van Hear et al. 2010). Newland and Patrick (2004) submit that diaspora members may be even less disposed to conciliation than individuals who have remained in the country of origin, because diaspora members are sheltered from the daily effects of violence.

In summary, while there are many apparent benefits of diaspora philanthropy, there are challenges that must be carefully considered. Davies (2010) warns that the conduct of diaspora communities is very context specific; as Newland and Patrick (2004) assert, "Diaspora engagement in countries of origin is so varied as to defy generalization," (p.23). As such, diaspora philanthropy can be only one component of strategies to provide humanitarian aid to migrants.

Methodology

This article is based on data collected through semi-structured interviews with individuals in leadership roles in four Syrian diaspora nonprofit organizations that provide services and humanitarian

assistance to conflict-affected Syrians inside and outside of Syria. The interview protocol, based in part on a survey by Riddle and Brinkerhoff (2011) and an interview protocol by Soss (2000), contains questions that explore personal motivations for becoming involved in philanthropic activity, mechanisms by which diaspora members engage with individuals inside Syria and within the region, mechanisms for sending money and resources to the region and expectations of accountability for funds, mechanisms for assessing the success of an intervention, and links between philanthropy and individuals' perceptions of the broad political goals of the Syrian diaspora.

Interview participants were selected using a purposive sample based on individuals' leadership roles within Syrian philanthropic networks. Twenty-six diaspora Syrians who hold leadership roles in four Syrian diaspora nonprofit organizations were interviewed. All interview participants were Syrian or of Syrian descent with ongoing familial and friendship ties within Syria and the Middle East region. Organization founders, board members, and individuals who directed key programs and initiatives within the organization were considered to be leaders, even if these roles were unpaid. The sample size will increase in the future as interviews are conducted with additional frontline staff and service recipients. However, because individuals in leadership roles were the focus of this phase of the project, saturation was reached with twenty-six participants (Creswell 1998, Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Many interview participants were involved in efforts by multiple diaspora networks, and talked about their work with various initiatives in several countries. The individuals in the sample were engaged in activism, volunteering, donating money or resources, and other philanthropic activity targeted towards Syrians inside Syria and those displaced to other countries including Canada, Germany, Lebanon, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States. Because of an interest in the effectiveness of diaspora aid to migrants in the global South, this paper focuses specifically on interview data related to organizations' efforts in Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey.

Interviews were conducted between February 2015 and August 2016. Interviews were conducted in person in Germany, Lebanon, and the United States, and by phone or Skype/Google hangouts with individuals based in the Arabian Gulf, Europe, Lebanon, and North America. Most interviews were conducted in English, with the eight interviews conducted in Arabic by a native Arabic speaker.

Findings: *The advantages of diaspora motivations*

All diaspora Syrians in the sample discussed their Syrian identity and their emotional ties to Syria as strong motivations to engage in providing aid to Syrian forced migrants. This is similar to other findings from the existing literature on diaspora philanthropy (Best et al. 2013, Brinkerhoff 2008, Brinkerhoff 2011, Nielsen & Riddle 2009, Tchouassi & Sikod 2010, Werbner 2002). Even for the many interview participants who had never lived in Syria, a powerful emotional connection was evident. In fact, many interview participants who had never lived inside Syria prefaced their statements with comments such as “Because I’m from Syria...”, “Because I’m from Aleppo...”, or “Because I’m from Homs...”, showing a deep sense of belonging even among second generation migrants. As one diaspora leader explains,

So at that point (when I became involved in aiding Syrian forced migrants), things had started to get bad and so I felt like I had so much that I owed to Syria, in terms of my cultural upbringing and going back there every summer. It was kind of a home away from home for me, and obviously for me, where my parents were born and my family was. So I felt like given the magnitude of what was going on there, it was really an obligation of mine to try and give back in some way, shape or form, and (this diaspora organization) felt like a great way to do that.

Or as a local employee of a Syrian diaspora organization notes,

Because (the Syrian diaspora founders) were brought up abroad they have this mentality of sharing what they have, and improving conditions for the Syrians. The founders never cut that cord between themselves and Syria; it is still there.

Throughout the interview data it was evident that these ancestral ties meant that the interview participants felt they were compelled to engage in work with migrants leaving Syria, regardless of obstacles. As one employee notes,

A lot of NGOs, Syrian or Lebanese or Turkish local NGOs, they are funded by a big funder like the UN and if they stop the funding, the NGO stops the project. But we have so many Syrian donors abroad, if one donor leaves or suspends funds, we can look for other donors and continue the project. Our donors are willing to stick with us even when things get hard, or there is donor fatigue with this migrant crisis.

With all interview participants, it was clear that an awareness that one's fellow Syrians are reliant on diaspora assistance generated a sense of obligation to continue aid during challenging times (Brinkerhoff 2004, 2008, 2014, Lubkemann 2008).

The advantages of cultural competence and familiarity

As is suggested in the literature (Johnson 2007, Newland & Patrick 2004), many diaspora members in this sample seem to have additional cultural competency and local knowledge that supports them in their efforts to assist Syrian forced migrants. This was illustrated not only in interview data from diaspora members themselves, but also in interviews with local staff, many of whom were Syrian nationals. As one staff member of a Syrian diaspora NGO notes,

Having a board of Syrian expatriates does make a difference, I think mostly for the positive. All of the members on the board now used to visit Syria at least every other year for the summer, so they still have relatives in Syria, they know Syria, they are familiar with the culture. It's not like they left and never went back. And this is very important because they can relate the work to their lives, they can relate to the Syrians there, and they want to work to help their fellow Syrians move ahead. They are passionate about it.

Another staff member notes,

Being a Syrian (diaspora) NGO, the founders insisted on hiring Syrians, which I think was a very good idea because then the workers can relate to the crisis the children are going through, or have went through previously before coming to Lebanon. One of the challenges we found with the Syrian children and the parents is that the Lebanese teachers, they can't relate to them. They can't understand some of the cultural differences, and the trauma they are coming from,

but when the Syrians taught them, the children were psychologically and emotionally more at ease.

However, there are limitations to the degree of cultural competence that comes with simply being of Syrian descent. Within the interview data it was clear that Syrian nationals living in Southern countries receiving refugees, or those who had more recently lived in the global South, had a better sense of the local context than those Syrian diaspora members who had been raised in the global North and had less extensive experience inside Syria or the Middle East region. One employee explains,

Definitely because (the Syrian diaspora donors) are not living in Syria now and because they never lived in Syria as citizens, but as expatriates, sometimes they see things from the eyes of a person who has a top-notch education, who has traveled the world, who has experience, and they have expectations that are not realistic. For example, they might expect that the refugees are going to learn English in like four months, which is impossible, or expect them to know how to use the laptop. So they had to learn about the children. They also expected the teachers to know more modern or more interactive styles of teaching, more children-centered styles, and of course they don't know that. So these are all things they have to learn about the local environment when they come visit the schools."

Interview participants also described diaspora-designed interventions that were based on conditions typically found in the global North but not common in Southern countries, and especially uncommon in refugee tent encampments. One employee mentions,

We had a donor who wanted to give us fifty tablets for a more interactive classroom, but we said, "Hang on, let's see if we can find Arabic apps first," because most apps are very hard for us to use with our students, for example with reading or science, because the students can't read English. So we had to let (the donor) know they should let us do this research first before they go buy tablets. Plus in our tent school, there is sometimes electricity but there is no internet, so (the Syrian diaspora donor) forgot that our schools and our students are different."

Syrian nationals and Syrian diaspora members living in the global South described efforts to educate diaspora Syrians from the global North on the local context when working with diaspora funded projects in the region. One explains,

Initially they (the diasporan Syrians) didn't have a very accurate idea of what it is like to work here and what we need to do, but now they do, because now they come visit us twice a year. Some of them haven't been here so they still don't understand what goes on here, and all the aspects of helping out.

Another states,

They (the Syrian diaspora donors) used to have very high expectations but now they have learned that it takes time. We have taught them, “Calm down, slow down, it takes extra time here,” and now they understand that they have to wait longer for things to get accomplished.

These data indicate that while diaspora members may bring a certain level of cultural competency to efforts to aid forced migrants (Johnson 2007, Newland & Patrick 2004), the degree of competency in the local context may vary greatly based on the country of residence of the diaspora member, and the extent of their experience living and working in the global South.

The advantages of informal networks and accountability

The literature on diaspora philanthropy suggests that diaspora members may be particularly capable of evaluating potential partners, and may be able to enforce agreements even in places where legal systems are absent or weak (Brinkerhoff 2011, Newland & Patrick 2004). Data from these interview participants indicate that Syrian diaspora members have an enhanced ability to identify trustworthy partners and circumvent challenges in the operating environment, such as non-functioning financial systems, by making use of information gathered through their social network ties in the diaspora. The Syrian diaspora’s social network not only allows for the collection of information about potential partners, but makes use of the powerful role that reputation plays in Arab social contexts.

In many collaborative public service networks, trusted individuals share knowledge of local needs in order to better serve people (Arino and de la Torre 1998; Bryson et al. 2006; Merrill-Sands and Sheridan 1996). Syrian diaspora organizations benefit from connections to diaspora social networks when selecting potential partners. Syrian social networks traditionally are dense (Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993, Leenders and Heydemann 2012; Stevens 2016), assisting members both materially and socially (El-Said and Harrington 2009). As one Syrian diaspora member describes:

The organizations I work with, I know the people personally that work within the organization, so you really do know what’s going on, what the motives are, is there an agenda, is there not.

Versus (another Syrian diaspora organization), the reason why we were very skeptical was because, well, we didn't see any people that we know. It was just the idea that we've never seen this organization, what exactly is their agenda; you do feel skeptical when you're not familiar. And that might be a bad thing where we happen to be very exclusive at times, where maybe Syrians are a little more superstitious or just kind of more skeptical, but we're very much a close-knit community.

The capacity to pinpoint trustworthy partners through diaspora social networks gives Syrian diaspora members "eyes on the ground" in places where it is difficult for aid organizations to operate. Trusted individuals can provide an assessment of local needs, and offer channels to transit money, goods, and expertise into communities that might otherwise be problematic to reach (Sidel 2008, Tchouassi & Sikod 2010.) Syrian diaspora organizations use the trust embedded in their social networks to assess people and organizations with whom they can cooperate. As another Syrian diaspora member living in Lebanon explains,

Most of the founders are not in Syria. It's only me in Lebanon and all the other founders are in the United Arab Emirates...The founders are not involved in the operation, what we do is we get the funds and then we find the proper partner to do the renovation (of schools) for us. Most of the founders were involved in what's going on in Syria, so we have our networks, we have our contacts, we have our friends and our families who are part of what is going on. So this is how we started, then the good names are easy to figure out."

Diaspora organizations also overcome financial and security barriers in Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey through the connections that derive from their friend and family networks. These social networks allow Syrian diaspora organizations to access resources that make them more productive. For example, a trusted Syrian individual regularly withdraws cash from a diaspora organization's United States bank account at an ATM in Lebanon in order to operate refugee schools and pay teachers. Since Syrian organizations are viewed with suspicion in Lebanon and typically are not permitted to open bank accounts, and U.S. banking regulations make it remarkably challenging to transfer money to the region, this informal arrangement with a trusted partner is the only means by which to fund operations.

Interview participants also describe identifying trustworthy partners who can move money, supplies, and other aid across the border into Syria. As one interview participant notes,

So we try to send some money to some trusted affiliate NGOs in Turkey then to get the money from Turkey to Syria. This is for the North part. For the South part we manage it through Lebanon, we transfer the money to some friends or some trusted person in Lebanon, then we pay it in Lebanon so they can get it to the south. It used to be (that we had to carry cash across the border). Now we have some good networks where you can get the money whenever you want and you can pay it directly inside.

Trusted individuals and organizations are identified through diaspora social networks, and can be held accountable for any malfeasance through the same social network. To ensure the success of the screening process and the successful delivery of services, Syrian diaspora organizations rely on a crucial tool of informal accountability- reputation (Romzek et al 2012; Tsai 2007; Hossain 2010). Reputation can be used to sanction or reward partners professionally and socially. If individuals or organizations lose their reputation within the Syrian diaspora network, then the potential for any future collaboration decreases, and their social reputation is automatically affected. In the case of Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey, Syrian diaspora organizations are concerned about their own reputation, and also rely on reputation to ensure that partners provide services effectively. As one interviewee indicated:

So there's certainly a vetting process, there is certainly documentation that we need from them, pictures, we need receipts. But at the end of the day we're working in a conflict zone, it is a war zone. We try and meet with people in person when we're in Turkey as much as possible. Usually the contact comes from an already existing trusted person or organization that we work with, so we get that introduction. As an organization, humanitarian, your reputation is everything on the ground. Whether it's ours or someone else's, reputation is a big part of what we do. We make sure to maintain our reputation, but also pay attention to the reputation of our partner, because who we work with is extremely important to our reputation.

Of course, social networks and reputation also are important in the broader, non-diaspora aid community. However, Syrian diaspora members benefit from a different form of social network that is comprehensive, geographically dispersed, and made up of individuals with highly varied skill sets and connections. This allows Syrian diasporans to reach difficult-to-access areas and

circumvent problematic systems that are challenging during war time. Reputation also is a more powerful tool of accountability in the Syrian diaspora community, because diaspora membership raises the stakes that come with a loss of reputation. Partners fear losing reputation not just professionally, but within larger family and friendship networks in the Syrian diaspora. These reputational concerns motivate the person making a recommendation to only recommend partners in which he or she is truly confident, and motivates the partner to perform honestly and effectively.

Conclusion

As is mentioned in the literature review, diaspora philanthropy should not be thought of as a magic bullet that can solve the problems of humanitarian aid to forced migrants. Some interview participants note that the social network ties that serve as an asset in providing aid also mean that aid often is limited to communities where diaspora members have friendship and family ties. Rather than being identified through a needs assessment, sites of aid are identified through an assessment of ones' social network, with preference often given to locations where social networks will make humanitarian projects most feasible.

Nonetheless, there seem to be clear benefits that come with Syrian diaspora members providing aid to forced migrants arriving in countries of the global South. Many Syrian diaspora members, being from the global South themselves, have past experience that allows them to develop effective strategies for circumnavigating institutions that may be ineffective, corrupt, or may not function in the ways that individuals from more economically developed countries expect. Southern-based actors may have more knowledge about local conditions and needs, even when compared to diaspora members who have ancestral roots in the global South but have lived a majority of their lives in the global North. Syrian diaspora members have a social network advantage that allows them to identify trustworthy partners through friend and family networks, relying on reputation as an accountability mechanisms. Finally, Syrian diaspora members have

strong emotional ties to their fellow Syrians, leading them to persevere in their provision of aid in contexts that are challenging and at times dangerous.

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