

# DO SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA IMMIGRANTS TRANSFER SOCIAL CAPITAL ACQUIRED IN THE HOST COUNTRY TO THEIR FOREBEARS?

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## **Abstract**

*Most studies examining how sub-Saharan African countries (SSA) can benefit from migration, pay more attention to the financial and human capital transfers sent by SSA diaspora living outside the continent. Little attention is given to the social capital transfers of SSA migrants residing within the SSA region. The objective of this paper is to highlight how SSA migrants mobilize social capital in their host country and then transfer it to their country of origin, boosting financial and human capital transfers in the process. The study uses the case of Somali migrants in Kenya to demonstrate this. The study uses content analysis research method, where literature from peer-reviewed journals, academic theses, reports and grey literature is reviewed. Findings from the study reveal that social linkages, kinship, community and religious networks have been important pull factors for Somali migrants to settle in Kenya. These networks are essential in influencing where the Somali migrants settle in Kenya and they can be credited for the growth of Somali migrant population in Eastleigh (a suburb in Nairobi which hosts a substantial number of Somalis in Kenya). The migrants are faced with myriad integration and security challenges and they are forced to mobilize social capital from transnational networks as a coping strategy that helps them meet their social and economic needs, build resilience and reduce vulnerability. Then they use the social capital they have mobilized in Kenya to facilitate the movement of Somalis from homeland and refugee camps; support of needy compatriots in the diaspora; and the sustenance of the Somali society back home.*

**Keywords:** social capital, migration, transnational, diaspora, networks

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Most studies examining how sub-Saharan African countries (SSA) can benefit from migration, pay more attention to the financial and human capital transfers sent by SSA diaspora living outside the continent. Little attention is given to the social capital transfers of SSA migrants residing within the SSA region. The objective of this paper is to highlight how SSA migrants mobilize social capital in their host country and then transfer it to their country of origin, boosting financial and human capital transfers in the process. The study uses the case of Somali migrants in Kenya to demonstrate this.

A significant share of migration in SSA is intraregional and occurs mainly between neighbouring countries (Ammassari 2012; International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2014; Adepaju 2011; Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS) 2012). Intraregional and inter-country migrants in SSA include temporary cross-border workers, traders, irregular migrants, skilled professionals and refugees (Adepaju 2011). These migrations are usually fuelled by political instability, poverty, and rapid economic growth and they are directed to a few countries, which are perceived to be more stable and offer better opportunities for the migrants (Adepaju 2011).

The social capital transferred by migrants to their homeland has the potential for substantial development impact (Moser and Dani 2008). “Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu 1986:248). When migrants arrive in the destination country, they establish social ties with people and groups from their homeland for orientation into the new environment, material support, as well as social and career connections at the host country (Ammassari 2012). The migrants also establish wider ties beyond people from their home country and make new connections with the local community and other people in the destination country (Ammassari 2012). At the

same time, they maintain their social capital at home through visits, regular communication, remittances, membership in home associations or even marriage with a compatriot (Ammassari 2012). Interfacing social capital both abroad and at home helps migrants to develop transnational identities and loyalties in both origin and destination countries, which are crucial in the transfer and re-transfer of financial and human capital (Ammassari 2012).

The focus of this paper is to highlight how Somali migrants in Kenya transfer the social capital they have accumulated and maintained in Kenya to sustain the Somali society in their homeland, in the face of dysfunctional institutional structures in Somalia brought about by a protracted and unresolved conflict situation.

The rest of the chapter is organized as follows: section two explains the role of social capital in facilitating the migration of Somalis from their home country with particular attention on how they settle in Kenya. The third section shows how the Somali migrants in Kenya maintain and accumulate social capital. This is followed by an account of how the Somali diaspora in Kenya use their social capital to participate in societal maintenance in their homeland. The final section provides the concluding remarks.

## **2. ROLE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN FACILITATING SOMALI MIGRATION**

Somalis have a long networking tradition within their society, which stems from the basic building blocks of their society - kinship and ethnic linkages (Scheibel 2009; Ali 2013). Both old and younger generations of the Somalis are socialised to value and maintain friendship and kinship ties (Hussein 2011). This societal obligation helps the Somalis to carry a networking dynamic wherever they go (Scheibel 2009). The Somali diaspora maintains a web of interlinking networks between home, host and other diasporic locations (Affi 2012). These networks are usually based on strong kinship and friendship ties, which are rooted in the Somali culture and religion (Hussein 2011; Ali 2013; Horst 2004).

Historically, many Somalis were nomadic pastoralists with a long history of migration (Lewela 2012; Ali 2013; Lindley 2010; Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS) 2012). Their migration goes back to pre-independence period when they used to migrate to neighbouring countries and other parts of the world with the help of assistance networks over long distances (Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS) 2012). Nonetheless, the Somali civil war of the late 1980s and early 1990s and the eventual collapse of the Somali Government in 1991, led to unprecedented migration of Somalis to Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Yemen and other destinations within and outside Africa (Ali 2013; Hussein 2011; Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS) 2012).

The movement of Somalis is influenced by access to social capital, among other factors (Ali 2013). The migration of Somalis from their homeland or from refugee camps is largely facilitated by transnational and kinship networks of Somalis in the diaspora who give them financial and social support (Lindley 2010; Ali 2013; Hussein 2011). This is normally in adherence to cultural obligation that requires the people with financial and material ability to help the needy. Successful members of the diaspora therefore feel obligated to help their kin and kith in need of help (Ali 2013; Hussein 2011).

## **2.1 Migration of Somalis to Kenya**

Kenya is a favourite destination for Somali migrants and hosts the largest Somali migrant population (both refugees and non-refugees) (Connor and Krogstad 2016). Apart from the fact that Kenya's geographic proximity and traditional migration paths makes it a convenient destination for Somali migrants (Moret, Baglioni, and Efonayi-Mäder 2006), the migration of Somalis to Kenya is also greatly influenced by social linkages, kinship ties, and community and religious networks (Huot 2014). The transnational and kinship networks among the Somali migrants play an important role in facilitating the movement of their compatriots to Kenya (Hussein 2011; Ali 2013).

Even Somalis who have migrated to Europe and other countries and have acquired the citizenship of those countries often return back to Kenya in considerable numbers (Ali 2013). The networks and linkages of Somalis in the diaspora offer emotional and material support that are important in helping the migrants settle in the new location by giving them access to essentials like accommodation, livelihood opportunities and friendship and relationship arrangements (Huot 2014).

The presence of strong bonds of brotherhood with Kenyan Somalis, with whom they share a sense of belonging and cultural and religious similarities, has been key in influencing the migration of Somalis to Kenya (Iazzolino 2013; Ali 2013; Sterenborg 2012; Moret, Baglioni, and Efiionayi-Mäder 2006).

Most of the Somalis who migrated to Kenya after 1991 went to refugee camps, while a few with financial means and networks in Kenya settled in Eastleigh (Hussein 2011; Iazzolino 2013). Over time, many of the Somali migrants living as refugees in the camps have been moving to urban centres citing hardship in camps like food scarcity, physical insecurity, sexual abuses, and scarce education and job opportunities (Moret, Baglioni, and Efiionayi-Mäder 2006; Lindley 2007; Huot 2014). This is despite concerted efforts by the Government of Kenya to contain the refugees in the camps (Lindley 2007; Hussein 2011; Ali 2013).

In some cases, the migration of Somalis to Kenya and the escape of Somali refugees from camps is facilitated by middlemen among Kenyan Somalis, who devise strategies to help them travel, stay, do business and buy properties in Kenya (Hussein 2011). In Kenya, Somalis have the tendency of settling with other Somalis for easier access to social and kinship networks that are essential for their survival (Ali 2013). The migrants have settled in major urban centre like Garissa, Mandera, Nakuru, Mombasa and Nairobi (Hussein 2011). Kinship ties between arriving Somalis and Kenyan Somalis is credited for the movement and growth of Somali

migrant population in Eastleigh - a suburb in Nairobi (Hussein 2011). Eastleigh is popularly known as *Mogadishu Ndogo* (Little Mogadishu) due to large concentrations of Somalis (Hussein 2011). Many Somalis are attracted to settle in Eastleigh by the aspirations of better education, finding a livelihood, or being able to support relatives in refugee camps or Somalia (Iazzolino 2013). The achievement of these aspirations is however tied to their ability to mobilize social capital drawing from their kinship ties (Iazzolino 2013).

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

The main research method used for this study is content analysis. This involves review of literature from peer-reviewed journals, academic theses, reports and grey literature, on the migration, integration and transnational involvement of Somali diaspora, with a focus on the Somali diaspora in Kenya. The Somali diaspora in Kenya was selected for this study because Kenya hosts the highest number of Somali migrants (both refugees and non-refugees) (Connor and Krogstad 2016).

Data collection starts with exploration of literature from published sources, electronic databases, search engines, web-pages; and active search for grey literature. This is followed by quality assessment of individual articles and then the body of evidence is summarized in terms of quality, size, context and consistency. The strength of the body of evidence is then graded using the results from these four dimensions. The method helps in understanding the historical and cultural norms among the Somalis that shape their community and transnational interactions and networks. The method also makes it possible to understand the importance of these networks in facilitating the migration of Somali migrants to Kenya; accumulating and maintaining social capital in their host country; and transferring this social capital to their home country in the context of protracted and unresolved displacement in their homeland.

#### **4. ACCUMULATION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL BY SOMALI MIGRANTS IN KENYA**

Many Somalis in Kenya are undocumented migrants who come into the country or escape from refugee camps, using unregulated migratory systems of middlemen and brokers (Moret, Baglioni, and Efionayi-Mäder 2006; Huot 2014; Lindley 2007). Those who escape from refugees camps engage in self-resettlement and are no longer under the protection of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Huot 2014). The refugees eventually end up in urban centres as undocumented migrants with no legal protection and economic assistance (Huot 2014; Hussein 2011). Such migrants are vulnerable, have minimal social, economic and political engagement and face myriad challenges related to integration and security (Huot 2014; Sterenborg 2012). Some of the problems they face in Kenya include police harassment and difficulties getting residence permits and finding livelihood in Kenya (Moret, Baglioni, and Efionayi-Mäder 2006; Lindley 2007; Huot 2014). Other integration related challenges are insecurity and institutional marginalization (e.g. difficulties getting work permits). The migrants also experience heightened xenophobia from Kenyan nationals due to suspicion that they could be terrorists or terrorist sympathisers (Ali 2013; Huot 2014; Sterenborg 2012). As a way of dealing with their vulnerability, the migrants are forced to mobilize and maintain social capital from transnational networks, of social, digital and economic interconnections, from both within and outside Kenya as a survival strategy (Sterenborg 2012; Lindley 2010; Scheibel 2009). The acquaintance and trust emanating from these close networks play a crucial role in their social and economic organization in Kenya (Hussein 2011).

Even though social networks are an important pull factor for the Somali migrants to settle in Eastleigh, these networks are expanded to form wider and closer networks with other Somalis in Kenya, Somalia and the wider Somali diaspora globally (Adama 2017; Carrier 2017). Eastleigh is therefore an important centre for Somali culture and social networking (Xinhua

2017). Eastleigh is also the hub for Somalis' income generating activities in Kenya and acts as a transnational economic centre (Huot 2014; Adama 2017). Eastleigh links the Somali community in Kenya to both the worldwide Somali diaspora and other global networks of trade (Adama 2017). The suburb offers an opportunity for the Somali community to have trade inter-linkages and connections with the world's most significant trade hubs like Dubai, Bangkok, Hong Kong and Guangzhou (Adama 2017; Carrier 2017).

Somali migrants are able to accumulate social capital from existing kinship and community networks in Kenya and even the undocumented migrants who come into the country irregularly or as refugees, are able to become well established economically and to even start helping their relatives in Somalia and other countries (Lewela 2012).

## **5. TRANSFER OF SOCIAL CAPITAL BACK TO SOMALIA**

“The diaspora remains the bridge between the adopted countries around the globe and Somalia's economic, social and political stability and future development” (Schwabenland et al. 2016:221). Diaspora resources include contacts and networks in both the hostland and homeland, including regional and local authorities, civil society and other external actors (Horst et al. 2010). The social capital that the diaspora accumulate in host countries can be used as a channel for enhancing development in countries of origin (Dahre 2001).

Social capital and networks acquired abroad have played an important role in enhancing the participation of the Somali diaspora in socio-economic and political activities in their home country (Lewela 2012). This has been made possible by rapid technological evolution that has helped the Somali diaspora to cultivate and maintain critical lifelines (Scheibel 2009). The absence of state interference has also contributed to the rapid technological evolution all over Somalia (Scheibel 2009). Diaspora participation in Somalia include sending finances, investing in commercial enterprises, service provision, political participation and skills and knowledge



transfer through return migration (Dahre 2001; Sheikh and Healy 2009; Scheibel 2009; Ismail 2011; Lewela 2012).

## **5.1 Remittances**

The Somali society is heavily dependent on financial capital from its diaspora and thus remittances form the highest percentage of diaspora's contribution to Somali economy (Lewela 2012; Scheibel 2009). The financial remittances sent by the Somali diaspora are the lifeblood of the Somali economy and constitutes the greatest share of diaspora's contribution to the reconstruction of Somalia (Lewela 2012). The finances are usually used to support families and relatives, for business start-up capital and for contributing to humanitarian relief and development efforts or community development projects (Schwabenland et al. 2016; Ismail 2011; Heritage Institute for Policy Studies 2014; Lewela 2012). The Somali diaspora in Kenya for instance send remittances to Somalia regularly to support local schools (Lewela 2012).

There are expansive diaspora networks across the globe that send remittance to compatriots in Somalia, refugee camps and those in need of help in other locations all over the world. In conflict ridden Somalia, sending of remittances would have been very difficult without the well-known informal financial system called *Hawalaad*. *Hawalaad* is comprised of a network of individuals and organizations both in the diaspora and Somalia that use informal methods to transfer money from the diaspora to Somalia (Scheibel 2009). Societal networks and cultural norms are the building blocks of this money transfer system (Scheibel 2009). *Hawalaad* system is based on trust and solidarity cultivated through cultural and ethnic networks of people who are not necessarily affiliated to each other through business (Scheibel 2009; Iazzolino 2013). The use of *Hawalaad* forms part of Somali culture abroad since supporting those in need is a social obligation for the diaspora (Iazzolino 2013). A visit to the *Hawaladar* (person involved in the *Hawalaad* system) therefore offers an opportunity to fulfil cultural norms as well as a chance to meet another person with the same culture and speaking the same language (Scheibel

2009). The *Hawalaad* system uses high speed technology and is fast and effective (Scheibel 2009). Sending money through *Hawalaad* takes less than one hour and reaches even the remotest parts of Somalia (Scheibel 2009). Apart from *Hawalaad*, there are other locally owned remittance transfer companies like Dahabshil that are used to transfer money to Somalia (Affi 2012). Other channels used by the diaspora to send remittances include international remittance companies like MoneyGram and Western Union (Affi 2012). The diaspora also sends money through cash hand-carry by those visiting Somalia (Affi 2012).

## **5.2 Investing in business**

In the absence of a stable government, the Somali diaspora rely on social networking as an important factor for building trust in business endeavours (Scheibel 2009). Access to social, professional and transnational networks makes it possible for the Somali diaspora to run commercial enterprises in their home country with ease (Heritage Institute for Policy Studies 2014). The diaspora invest in commercial or developmental undertakings in private and social sectors in their homeland (Affi 2012; Scheibel 2009; Ismail 2011). They either send money to their relatives for investment purposes or return back to Somalia themselves to invest (Affi 2012). Many businesses in Somalia have shareholders in the diaspora (African Development Bank (AfDB) 2013).

Kenya is an important business centre for Somalia's business elite with important networks (Harper 2010), that are useful for establishing businesses in Somalia. Eastleigh Business Community (EBC), an association of local entrepreneurs in Eastleigh (Iazzolino 2013), is an important business network for Somali business people who may want to start a business in Somalia.

### **5.3 Service provision and community development**

The Somali diaspora has many small fundraising networks globally that are interested in supporting service delivery and sustained development in Somalia (Sheikh and Healy 2009). In the absence of public sector services, social and transnational networks of Somali diaspora come in handy to offer much needed basic services like healthcare, education, water and infrastructure (African Development Bank (AfDB) 2013; Dahre 2001; Affi 2012). The diaspora support and promote education initiatives by rehabilitating primary and secondary schools, sending material contributions and/or returning back to Somalia to construct schools (Affi 2012; African Development Bank (AfDB) 2013). Diaspora networks are critical to the provision and availability of healthcare services especially in South-Central Somalia (Affi 2012).

Diaspora associations also use their transnational networks home and abroad to link up with communities in Somalia and to fund community specific projects (Affi 2012).

The Somali diaspora includes many professionals with important skills that can benefit Somalia (Affi 2012). Somali diaspora professional associations like lawyers, midwives, academics, etc., play an important role in providing technical support in various fields. One of the ways that Somali professionals contribute to service provision in their home country is by engaging in return visits to Somalia to give technical skills, advice and leadership in different professional fields (Hammond 2012; African Development Bank (AfDB) 2013).

### **5.4 Lobbying and advocacy**

The Somali diaspora have significant influence in their private and public capacities emanating from their networks and contacts in host countries and transnationally (Scheibel 2009). The diaspora often use these networks to engage with and lobby governmental and non-governmental actors to undertake activities in their homeland (Laakso 2011; Scheibel 2009).

Diaspora leaders (especially those in powerful host states) either seek to use or are used by those states in their engagement with home country (Affi 2012). Somalis in the diaspora usually have an advantage over the local Somalis since their exposure abroad helps them to speak in a language that resonates with the international community (Laakso 2011).

The Somali diaspora in Kenya has been actively involved in many lobbying activities. In June 2011, the Somali community in Kenya together with their compatriots in Uganda, Europe and United States of America, were involved in demonstrations in support of the then Prime Minister Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (Lewela 2012). The Somali diaspora are also involved in various peace conferences held in Kenya to discuss the peace of their country (Lewela 2012). They also lobby peace making stakeholders by sending them official letters signed by members of the Somali community (Lewela 2012). The Somali community in Kenya also usually receive their leaders at the airport and have close door meetings with them (Lewela 2012). The power of lobbying was demonstrated when they prevailed upon the transitional Federal Government in Somalia to retain the Somalia ambassador to Kenya Mohamed Ali Nur (Lewela 2012).

Diaspora networks are also involved in advocacy both in the host country and in Somalia (Ismail 2011). Asha Hagi Elmi, a co-founder of Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC), who lives in Nairobi since 2006, has been advocating for a safe and sustainable Somalia that will ensure that women overcome marginalization, violence and poverty in their communities (Lewela 2012).

There are numerous Somali civil society groups based in large communities of Somalis such as Nairobi (Schwabland et al. 2016). A good example of such groups is the Youth United for Social Mobilization (YUSOM), a non-governmental and non-profit organization chaired by Farhan Mohamed, a Somali youth living in Kenya (Lewela 2012). YUSOM works with

Somali youth in Eastleigh, North Eastern Kenya and South- Central regions in Somalia (Lewela 2012).

### **5.5 Political participation**

The Somali diaspora carries significant influence on Somali political affairs. They either get involved directly by running for political positions or indirectly through political activism and mobilization of political contacts (Dahre 2001; Affi 2012; Lewela 2012; Ismail 2011). The Somali diaspora in Kenya have substantial influence on Somalia's political direction (Lewela 2012). In April 2000, the Somali community in Kenya stood in solidarity with the Puntland Government when it withdrew support for the Djibouti Conference, complaining of exclusion, suppression and marginalisation of mainstream Somali communities as well as mismanagement of the peace process (Lewela 2012).

Kenya is home to Somali political elite who have great influence in the governance of Somalia (Harper 2010; Lewela 2012). There are many Somali members of parliament and other politicians who live in Nairobi. Even the Transitional Federal Government used Nairobi as their base for a while (Lewela 2012). In the past, Somali politicians have used Nairobi for their political activities (Lewela 2012). In May 2011, Haji Mohamed Yassin, launched his presidential bid in Nairobi and invited many Somali members of parliament and other leaders (Lewela 2012). There are also some Somali political parties with branches in Nairobi e.g. Tayo Somalia Political Party (Lewela 2012)

### **5.6 Skills and knowledge transfer through return migration**

Somali diaspora are motivated to return to Somali to transfer the skills and knowledge they have acquired abroad. The return migration of the Somali diaspora is only feasible when there are social, family and professional networks in both the hostland and homeland that would enable circular migration patterns between Somalia and the host country places before and after

return (Heritage Institute for Policy Studies 2014). These networks are important in ensuring availability of job/business opportunities or political positions, which are important motivations for return (Heritage Institute for Policy Studies 2014).

The presence of family networks in host country is an important fall back plan for the returnee, offering the comfort that the family can facilitate evacuation in case the security situation in Somalia deteriorates (Heritage Institute for Policy Studies 2014).

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Migrants' social capital transfers to their country of origin is as important as financial and human capital transfers, and to a large extent, migrants have to mobilize their social capital to be able to send money or transfer human capital to their home country. Migrants from politically unstable countries and who have gone through protracted displacement like Somali migrants need to be given special attention when analysing migrants' contribution to development in their homeland.

Traditionally, the Somali community has unique cultural norms and obligations that ensure the cultivation and maintenance of kinship and community ties and networks. This culture of networking has become the lifeline for the Somali people in the face of a prolonged and continuing conflict situation in Somalia that has led to mass migration and destruction of institutions and infrastructure. The Social capital drawn from these kinship and familial ties plays a vital role in ensuring cultivation and mobilization of social capital to facilitate the movement of Somalis from homeland and refugee camps; the support of needy compatriots in the diaspora; and the sustenance of the Somali society back home.

Kenya hosts a large Somali community with interconnections of kinship, community and transnational networks that transverse the globe. These networks have been useful in facilitating the movement of Somali migrants and giving them material and social support to

settle and integrate in Kenya in spite of the myriad challenges many undocumented Somali migrants face. Eastleigh is an important base for the cultivation and mobilization of kinship and social networks, which are vital in enabling the migrants to be economically and socially stable. The social capital mobilized within the community then becomes a useful resource that the migrants use to participate in supporting the Somali society back home.

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