

Diaspora Humanitarianism in Complex Crises (D-Hum)

Background and theoretical framework

Diaspora groups have emerged as key humanitarian actors in situations of protracted displacement and conflict. They are often the first to assist in acute emergencies and remain engaged during lengthy and complex crises. Their remittances reach remote areas and hard-to-reach populations, surpassing humanitarian aid sent to fragile states six times (Development Initiatives 2017). Yet, literature on diaspora humanitarianism is only emergent and policy engagement remains hesitant. Analyzing such assistance is therefore vital to understand the dynamics of humanitarian crises.

Focusing on Somalia, the D-Hum research project aims to provide such insights by analysing the mobilization, channeling, delivery and effects of diaspora humanitarianism. Based on multi-sited and simultaneous fieldwork in Somalia, Kenya and Europe, we will analyse how movements of goods, ideas and people are facilitated, mediated and blocked between and in these sites. We do so by developing the concept of humanitarian infrastructures: the material forms of transport, communication systems and technologies as well as institutions, social networks, and personal relations that facilitate and block movement of support (Donovan 2015; Kleinman 2014; Xiang and Lindquist 2014). Specifically, we will pay attention to gender and generation in these processes, and to the potentially contentious dimensions of diaspora interventions. Importantly, we include analysis of the effects of diaspora humanitarianism, including accountability and transformations over time.

Developing the notion of humanitarian infrastructures, D-Hum combines literature on post-disaster infrastructure recovery that examines material and technical systems with analysis of social institutions and networks. Drought commissions, elder committees, religious institutions, international humanitarian agencies as well as family and clan ties all condition how assistance is mediated and distributed, shaping the reproduction of power structures regarding who benefit from or are left out of humanitarian assistance. Affective circuits (Cole and Groes 2016), such as social webs of care and obligation, are part of the infrastructures that also encompass interactions with both local institutions and international humanitarian agencies.

D-Hum **objectives** are:

1. To provide theoretically and empirically grounded research on Somali diaspora humanitarianism and its infrastructures, as practiced and perceived from key sites and positions in Somalia, Kenya and Europe.
2. To strengthen individual and institutional research capacities in Somalia and Kenya on diaspora humanitarianism and to enhance South-South and North-South research partnerships.
3. To provide research-based tools for policy development on diaspora humanitarianism and enhanced collaboration between diaspora actors, the international humanitarian system and development agencies.

To reach these objectives, we ask the following **overall research question**:

- What kinds of assistance do Somali diaspora groups mobilize, channel and deliver to Somalia during complex crises and which social, material and technological infrastructures do they use or create in the process of doing so?

We break down the overall research question by asking the following **sub-questions**:

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- a. How do goods, ideas and people move or get blocked in diaspora humanitarian infrastructures, how are they governed, and what are their routes, speed, and durations?
- b. How do different social positions such as clan ties, gender, religion and intergenerational relations affect practices, expectations and experience of diaspora humanitarianism at different sites?
- c. What are the effects of Somali diaspora humanitarianism and what principles and future visions of humanitarianism guide it? How does it (re)produce or overcome divisions in Somalia?

We **hypothesize** that diaspora humanitarianism:

- Is characterized by growing coordination and consolidation vis-à-vis local and national Somali institutions, but run parallel to the international humanitarian system.
- Reflects gender and generational divisions as well as power structures in Somalia and in the diaspora that shape diaspora interventions as well as crisis-affected populations' access to and perceptions of diaspora humanitarianism.
- Is flexible, based around personalized relationships, adaptable and therefore more quick to mobilize than the international humanitarian system.

Methodology

D-Hum adopts a transnational social field perspective to examine "multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed" between different sites and positions (Levitt and Schiller 2004: 1009). We will engage in simultaneous, multi-sited fieldwork (Falzon 2009) at strategic sites of disaster-affected areas, including IDP camps; hubs for Somali institutions, international humanitarian agencies and diaspora engagement in Somalia and the region; and diaspora settlement countries, following these **analytical steps**:

1. Mapping of the diaspora humanitarian social field in a historic and contemporary perspective, based on available literature, secondary sources, and internet material. Identification of relevant actors and infrastructures to select extended case studies. As the humanitarian and security situation in Somalia is in constant flux, case selection will be undertaken close to the startup of fieldwork.
2. Simultaneous fieldwork at all sites, with emphasis on ethnographic methods to enable trust and rapport through long-term engagement, following the humanitarian infrastructures. Selected cases will be analyzed as they occur in real time and retrospectively across the transnational social field, analysing how diaspora humanitarianism – e.g. drought relief – is mobilized, channeled and delivered, and its effects for local populations. To provide rich meso-level material, we will use a matched sample methodology (Mazzucato 2008), linking networks between East Africa and Europe. When unfeasible, a thematically related but un-matched sample will be employed.

Fieldwork will combine interviews, focus groups and participant observation among diaspora actors, Somali institutions, humanitarian agencies, and crisis-affected populations. It will be carried out at strategic sites in Somalia, Kenya and Europe. In Somalia, we will focus on crisis-affected populations and the interactions between diaspora actors, Somali institutions, humanitarian agencies and local populations, contrasting the relatively stable political situation in Hargeisa with one or two other sites within the Somali region. In Kenya, fieldwork will take place in Nairobi which is a key hub for Somali settlements, in particular in the neighborhood of Eastleigh. Likewise Nairobi is an East African hub for humanitarian and development agencies,

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as well as embassies for donor countries. This site is thus central for the humanitarian infrastructures linking the wider diaspora, Kenya and Somalia. Finally Denmark, in particular Copenhagen, has been selected as the primary site to study long-distance diaspora humanitarianism but may be supplemented with fieldwork in other European countries.

D-Hum will employ an embedded ethics approach (Meskell and Pels 2005) where the security and integrity of researchers and project participants are an integrated part of the project design. All sensitive person data will be anonymized, based on informed consent, and stored and treated securely. Feasibility and security is of the highest priority, and enhanced by established, long-term networks at all study sites.

Organisation and management

The D-Hum consortium comprises International Development Studies (IDS), University of Nairobi; Rako Research and Communication Centre (RC), Hargeisa; Rift Valley Institute (RVI), Nairobi; and the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). The project is structured around 5 Work Packages, focusing on the study sites, policy and public engagement and academic training and dissemination. The management structure is further organized around a Steering Committee (SC) and supported by a Scientific Advisory Board, composed of internationally recognized academics. Finally, to ensure and deepen the relevance for programming and policy, D-Hum will conduct annual seminars and one-on-one meetings with a Stakeholder Group, consisting of policy-makers and NGOs, humanitarian and development agency representatives from Kenya, Somalia and Europe.

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