WORLD HUMANITARIAN ACTION FORUM

Promoting Collaboration and Challenging Inequitable Systems

Exploring Partnerships Between Diaspora and Domestic Actors for Humanitarian Initiatives and Beyond

WHAF consultation insights report

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The World Humanitarian Action Forum (WHAF) is an initiative, that brings together several humanitarian and development organisations to encourage effective collaboration with local actors to better serve affected communities. It does this primarily through the facilitation of discussions, forums and trainings.

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1: Introduction

"*The power of the diaspora and our solidarity is a force for positive change in our world. It can uplift communities, it can build bridges, and it can drive progress on such a global scale.*" (Shahin Ashraf, Islamic Relief Worldwide)

1.1 Background

Between July and November 2023 the World Humanitarian Action Forum (WHAF) conducted a series of consultations that sought opinions on the involvement of diaspora humanitarians in aid sector reform. This conversation emerged from a position of critique, noting the many voices, initiatives, and calls for change that have emboldened and progressed the now centrally appreciated imperative for greater equity in the sector. Greater equity poses a challenge to the Global North´s monopoly of power in the sector through the expectation that affected countries, communities and actors acquire leading roles in their own responses in addition to direct access to funding, which despite the numerous pledges and conversations on the same, have so far, failed to materialise. The consultation series furthermore acknowledges WHAFs organisational identity as one founded and led by UK based diaspora humanitarians in an effort to explore the potential of a different positionality within a broader ecosystem of change agents and stakeholders.

During the approach to the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), WHAF and partners conducted a series of consultations aimed at amplifying the perspectives and experiences of diaspora-led humanitarian actors. These insightful discussions shed light on the challenges they faced and emphasised the urgent need for greater recognition of the diaspora's role. Encouragingly, there has been an evident increase in efforts to engage with diaspora humanitarian actors over the past seven years. Positive strides have been made, including the establishment of a comprehensive diaspora directory[1] and the initiation of collaborative initiatives and resources for diaspora groups. Notably, the British Red Cross Diaspora Humanitarian Partnership Programme has generously provided funding for this consultation series. The role of diasporas is steadily being acknowledged, in terms of the magnitude of capital transferred through remittances and the timely efforts they extend to countries of heritage during emergencies and their longer term commitments.

Sharing the struggles of their counterparts in countries of heritage, these acknowledgements have not however translated into a meaningful shift of power and resources to diaspora humanitarian actors, and the omission of the role of diasporas during Grand Bargain 2023 discussions is indicative of this[2]. Instead, interest in the value that diasporas bring, such as cultural understanding and proximity, has sometimes been perceived as extractive.[3] Furthermore, in a climate of needing to plug growing humanitarian funding gaps, concerns have been voiced that the international aid system is perceiving diaspora funding, and notably faith based giving, opportunistically[4].

[1] DEMAC, Organisations, viewed 06.07.23

[2] The Grand Bargain, which launched in 2016 on the tail of the World Humanitarian Summit, is a proposed "agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations who have committed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action, in order to get more means into the hands of people in need." See: IASC, The Grand Bargain: Transforming Humanitarian Action Annual Meeting 2023 – Summary Note, accessed 09.11.23

[3] Shabaka and EUDiF, Diaspora Engagement in Times of Crisis, 2021, p.75

[4] This finding is informed by key informant interviews that questioned and critiqued UN agency fundraising strategies that solicit zakat donations, reflecting on the requisite principles of Islamic faith based giving.

On the flip side, and of primary importance, are the ongoing Global South driven demands for change in the sector – to increase localisation and direct funding and to realise participation and accountability aims. These systematic critiques have gained growing traction and momentum in the years since the WHS and in 2020 WHAF convened the reimagining aid global summit, focusing on localisation and decolonisation[5]. However, Progress towards required change continues to be slow and demands for a more equitable system unfortunately still remain a long way off.

This consultation sought to explicitly bring these two conversations, and particularly diaspora and local/ domestic humanitarian and development actors, together to listen to and learn from one another, to foster collaboration and seek solutions. It sought to do so by examining the role (actual and potential) of diaspora actors in challenging inequitable structures and what solidarity between local/domestic and diaspora actors for the same purpose could mean, with an openness that enabled the inclusion of both reform and to reinvent oriented perspectives. It further sought to examine the figurative ´diaspora bridge´ between countries of residence and heritage, and understand what diaspora positionality and leverage of the same, meant, or could mean, in practice with regards to conversations of aid critique and reform.

Owing to the fact that ´the diaspora´ is not a monolith, different experiences, contexts, degrees of organisational formality have given rise to a number of different positions, sometimes opposing or contradictory on the current and potential role of diasporas. Commonly however, and threaded across all conversations has been an acknowledgement of a strained or challenging relationship with the aid system by diaspora and domestic participants alike, and that greater diaspora and domestic collaboration is desired in order to meet the needs of citizens in heritage countries. This insights report therefore draws upon participant perspectives to identify what diaspora and domestic actors want to work on together as well as outlining the desired characteristics of partnership and collaboration.

1.2 Methodology and overview of the consultation series

The overarching research question for this consultation was:

What does or can diaspora solidarity look like within and / or beyond the contested international aid space?

- What is the role, actual and/or potential, of diasporas in working with local actors to improve human welfare in countries of origin/heritage?
- And how might they contribute to challenging (re-shaping and/or re-inventing) inequitable structures and systems as they do so?

This question was developed based on discussions with a number of informant interviews with key individuals in the aid sector who had previously indicated an interest in the subject and with whom WHAF has previously worked. Individuals represented a mix of diaspora led INGOs, diaspora network and research organisations, diaspora within INGOs, country specific diaspora organisations, local/domestic organisations and local/ domestic networks. These interviews sought perspectives on the role of the diaspora in reforming the aid sector as well as reflections on how the question itself should be framed. Their feedback encouraged a wider perspective of the diaspora ´role´ and challenged the assumed centrality of the aid system. These discussions therefore prompted an intentionally open-ended approach to the scope of the research question, enabling it to use the humanitarian aid system as an entry point to a broader conversation that could go beyond humanitarianism as the role of the diaspora and the international humanitarian aid system as the system of primary concern.

The conversations that ensued were premised however on a couple of core assumptions. Firstly, that diaspora humanitarians are sufficiently engaged with the aid system that is subject to our critique – that it is indeed central, or of concern, to their humanitarian activities. And secondly, that when diaspora and domestic actors

[5] WHAF, Aid Re-Imagined Global Summit, 2020

work together, that challenging it would necessarily be a priority. Of course if the first premise is problematic than the second will also not maintain, as we started to see during the progression of the conversations. Having said that, a large number of individuals participated and the feedback and opinions have been broad and varied, some unequivocally spoke to the research question and others pointed to other priorities and pre-occupations.

Country selection

The study took a case study approach for the purpose of enabling context specific perspectives to arise and to see if despite inevitable differences, whether or not common themes or sentiments emerged. Using purposive sampling, the three countries selected as the focus countries of this study were Pakistan, Somalia and Syria as they provide distinct humanitarian and development contexts within different regions of the world. Each have significant global diasporas with different contexts of diaspora engagement, and each have differing degrees of political and / or conflict related instability. Syria and Somalia share a history of civil war and both countries are divided into regions under the rule of different actors. Somalia´s humanitarian situation is compounded by the impact of climate change, namely severe droughts and floods. Climate related humanitarian catastrophe is a factor shared with Pakistan, whose context in terms of foreign aid is otherwise more development oriented, owing to the fact that the country has a sizeable share of natural disasters, not least the severe flooding in 2022 which submerged a third of the country.

In terms of their diaspora communities, each country provided different considerations. For Pakistan and Somalia one key factor is the long relationship of remittances and the involvement of diaspora communities in both humanitarian and development related work. Syria on the other hand has experienced a more recent diaspora phenomenon, with 6.8 million people seeking refuge in neighbouring countries in the wake of the civil war that started 12 years ago[6]. Whereas it might be said that all Pakistanis outside of Pakistan are considered part of the diaspora[7], for Somalia and Syria, this distinction tends to be more blurred. Syrians in the region (in Turkey for example) consider themselves more local than diaspora[8]. Whereas in Somalia, the diaspora is so embedded in governance that they might at the same time be considered local[9]. Finally, the distinction between ´humanitarian´ and ´development´ was blurred throughout all Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), attendees in all discussions represented NGOs that sat on either ends of this divide and participants tended to mix the two.

The consultation process

A **pre-consultation questionnaire**[10] was circulated to all invited to participate during the planned discussions prior to the opening session, with the main research question as well as suggestions and expectations for outcomes. These, together with the informant interviews helped shape the structure of the opening session and gave us some early insights on perceptions.

The consultation **opening session** took place online on 12 September 2023 and consisted of four speaker-led sessions on: diaspora perspectives; local / Global South perspectives: solidarity and working together, and; strengthening the pillars (relationships). Ten speakers presented different and, at times, differing perspectives and considerations. It was attended by 132 people from 32 countries (see country breakdown in Figure 1

[6] 3RP, Regional Strategic Overview 2023, 02 February 2023

[7] Based on conversations with the Pakistan FGD facilitator, Themrise Khan.

[8] Based on conversations with the Syrian FGD facilitator, Fadi Al´Dairi.

[9] A sentiment that emerged during the Somalia FGD.

[10] The questionnaire asked: 1) In your opinion, what does or can diaspora solidarity look like within and / or beyond the contested international "aid" space?; 2)Are there any specific topics or themes that you would like the consultation to explore?; and 3) What kind of outcome/s do you hope the consultation can achieve?

below). The primary intention of the opening session was to introduce the topic and provide the FGD participants with a starting point to take forward. As invitees were from a broad range of backgrounds and varying degrees of organisational formality and proximity to the system (including conversations on reform), the opening session aimed to familiarise participants with some of the key concepts.

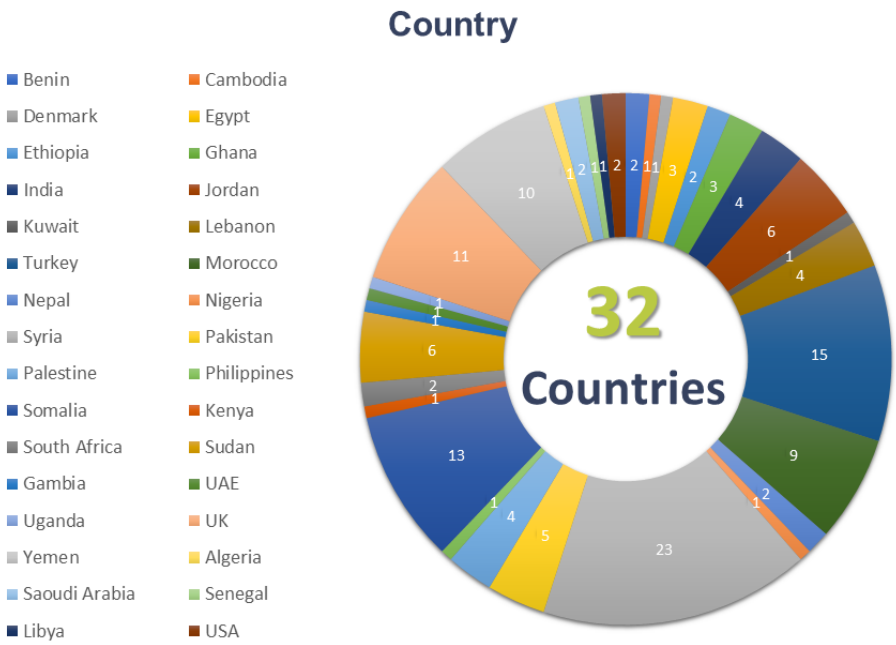

Figure 1: Opening session participating countries

	Participants				
	Male	Female	Domestic	Diaspora	Total
Questionnaire responses	14	8	5	17	22
Opening session speakers	5	6	4	6	11
Opening session attendees	96	36			132

Three separate online Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) followed for Syria, Pakistan and Somalia. WHAF pre-identified FGD invitees and sent invitations to a roughly even number of country specific domestic and diaspora actors. Diaspora actors were identified as actors whose engagement was specific to the country of heritage. Whilst the aim was to facilitate a balanced mix for the purpose of a local/domestic-diaspora discussion, the focus of the discussion was impacted by invitation take-up and participation on the day. Attendees were mostly NGO representatives, however network and forum representatives also participated, as did journalists and independents. The FGDs were structured around a set of open-ended questions[11] that the facilitators adapted and expanded where required.

[11] FGD Questions: 1) How do domestic actors and diaspora actors work together and perceive one another?; 2) What do participants identify as the inequitable systems or challenges that impede human welfare and meeting needs. Ie. On what is it important to work together / collaborate?; 3) What partnerships are important to develop and build on in order to work together for the objective of challenging inequitable systems?; 4) What are the opportunities to work together?; 5) How would participants like to see this conversation evolve?

	FGD Participants				
	Male	Female	Domestic	Diaspora	Total
Syria	16	9	(4 NW Syria)	17	25
Pakistan	2	4	3	3	6
Somalia	15	5	7	8	20

The research approach was informed by grounded theory, allowing for sequential rounds of questions and their adaptation according to an iterative analysis of insights.

Analytical methodology

The data generated from this consultation consisted of the questionnaire responses and the audio and chat transcripts for the opening session and the three FGDs. All were translated into English where required. Initial themes emerging from the FGDs were discussed separately and clarified with the respective country facilitators. These individual FGD summaries can be found in Annex 2.1- 2.3.

This review combines insights generated from all data sets, showing uncontested general insights as well as commonalities and tensions based on positionality or country specific considerations. This process was undertaken by WHAFs Research Coordinator with oversight of the Research Advisor.

1.3 Shortcomings of the consultation series

Whilst we sought to achieve balance across the FGDs and between domestic and diaspora representation, the FGD attendee invitations and registrations were not tightly controlled, resulting in some achieving more participation and some less. There was also a discrepancy between the attendance list and actual participation during the discussions and for these reasons it would not be appropriate to draw concrete conclusions from each discussion separately, nor direct comparisons between. The analytical approach therefore has been to demonstrate the themes that arose and show where these themes appeared to be shared.

Gender equity was well achieved in the opening session amongst speakers, however it was harder to achieve for FGD participation.

There were also a couple of possible barriers to engagement and participation. Firstly, whilst the research question was deliberately open ended so as to avoid prescribing the direction of the conversation, it could have lacked clarity for some participants, particularly where not well versed on the conversations surrounding inequity in the international aid system and calls for its reform. At the same time this can be seen as a strength, that there was not a marked conversational preference bias to begin with. Further, the insights have provided a solid starting point for the benefit of future discussions.

Chosen terminology itself can also be considered an obstacle to engagement and the issue of identification was discussed with key informants and facilitators throughout the series. Whilst we maintained the ´diaspora´ terminology and sought to provide space for nuance and abstraction, we acknowledged that that is not the chosen identification of everyone relevant to the discussion for various reasons, and could have put people off participating as a result. Please refer to Annex 1: A note on Terminology for further information on language choice and issues with the same.

Finally, the discussion was originally conceived to focus on diaspora communities in the Global North (although not exclusively) particularly in terms of analysing power centres that can be leveraged when trying

to affect change within the international aid system (also Global North). This centralisation of the international aid system arose as a critique as did questions around who the diaspora focus is and the importance of including diaspora communities in the Global South in such conversations. Whilst Global South diaspora inclusion was well achieved in the Syrian FGD, and actually Global South participation was generally higher than Global North participation throughout the series, the starting point and assumptions should also be shifted for future discussions. Perhaps prompting a more explicit focus on South-South diaspora and donor / system dynamics for an alternative perspective.

2: Diaspora Humanitarian Actors - Insights

> "*Diaspora solidarity is a key of connecting actors to improve human welfare in their countries of origin. In their countries of origin, we as actors can not reach anywhere without connection. This is the place of diaspora."* (Questionnaire response, Uganda / DRC)

2.1 Identifying the diaspora

The UN International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines diaspora as "migrants or descendants of migrants, whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background. They maintain links with their homelands, and to each other, based on a shared sense of history, identity, or mutual experiences in the destination country."[12] Further, diasporas are sometimes categorised according to the reason for migration: victim (or without choice - those expelled); imperial/colonial (migration due to home country expansion); trade (choice based migration - through business activities); and labour (pursuit of economic opportunity, in which case choice is not clear cut)[13]. All categories, with the exception of imperial / colonial, are relevant to this study.

For the purpose of this study, and borrowed / adapted from the definition used by Shabaka[14], we are focusing on first, second (and subsequent) generation diaspora who contribute to aid efforts in either the case study contexts or in humanitarian and development aid recipient countries generally.

That said, there are numerous intersectional variables and positionalities of diaspora humanitarian and development actors, even within one diaspora community. These positionalities impact on experiences, challenges, partnership dynamics and the way in which they view their role (in terms of working with domestic actors to address needs in the country of heritage, and challenging inequities - explored in the following section), as well as the way in which their role is perceived by domestic humanitarian actors. It is useful to bear these nuances in mind when considering the insights drawn from the consultations in order to appreciate the varied experiences and perspectives that shape an understanding of the role, actual and potential of the diaspora. They include:

- **Geography:** Where diaspora are located impact actual and perceived role. There can also be a distinction between diasporas in the Global South and the Global North relative to this discussion. For example, advocacy roles diasporas can play to donors and institutions, which for this conversation focused on the Global North centric aid system, but could as well have included ´non-traditional´ donors, such as Middle Eastern donors, and the role that advocacy by regional diasporas could also play to that regard. Further, proximate geography may have a tendency to influence the extent to which diaspora actors define themselves as such - for example, Syrian actors registered and based in Turkey considered themselves primarily to be ´local´ actors[15].
- **Country specific focus or not:** Country specific diaspora actors tend to have a different positionality than humanitarian actors and INGOs that are diaspora led and not necessarily country specific. Infact, the latter, which include for example UK based Muslim NGOs often do not identify themselves as diaspora at all,

[12] IOM Germany, Diaspora Engagement, accessed 01.11.23

[13] National Geographic, Diaspora, accessed 01.11.23

[14] Shabaka, Diaspora Engagement in Times of Crisis, May 2021. p6.

[15] Based on a conversation with the Syria FGD facilitator, Fadi Al-Dairi.

having sought to overcome this designation but may perhaps consider themselves ´diverse communities led[16]´ instead. Despite this difference however, diaspora (or diverse community led) INGOs still, relatively speaking, possess a different positionality to Western INGOs, particularly for example when considering shared identities with the countries in which they operate, whether that be based on ethnic heritage or faith.

- **Proximity to the humanitarian aid system:** Country specific diaspora actors tended, generally but not exclusively, to have less explicit connection with the humanitarian system, whereas diaspora led INGOs tended to have more, Islamic Relief Worldwide being the most obvious example of a diaspora (or diverse-community led) INGO. This impacts on the extent to which participants viewed the aid system as central to their work and whether or not they were concerned with its reform or primarily discussed their efforts independently of it.

- **Type of response:** There are also differences in approach between humanitarian and development focused diaspora actions, and in approaches when it comes to business and governance- which were not the primary focus of this study. Varying focus impacts on the relationships held and developed in countries of heritage, funding and implementation dynamics, and possibly the duration and sustainability of engagement.

- **Choice or not to migrate:** The experience and choice related to migration, and the shared experience or not of historic or current challenges of the country of heritage also impacts on how diaspora actors engage. For example, the extent to which diasporas have been able to integrate, establish themselves and leverage the opportunities of their resident countries and in turn what that might afford them in terms of support they can then provide to countries of heritage. Further, experiences of shared struggle may constitute a motivating factor for diasporas who did not migrate out of choice.

- **Relative timing of migration:** Relative timing of migration can impact on the extent to which resident country opportunities can be leveraged for the purpose of addressing needs in countries of heritage. Similar to the above point, and as Syrian FGD participants highlighted, there is a difference between Syrians who have left Syria in the last 12 years since the civil war, and the diaspora who have been overseas for decades. It was further suggested that the different groups can work together across regions and utilise each other's strengths to support each other.

- **Environment in the country of residence:** Positive or negative experiences within countries of residence can also have an impact on the way in which diaspora actors define themselves, their role and the way in which they work. For example, organisations that have a Muslim identity that seek to secularise in order to overcome Islamophobic attitudes, or diaspora led organisations that seek to conform to resident country norms / models in order to experience greater assimilation, acceptance and presumably support. Whilst these observations are nuanced and not necessarily positive or negative, it speaks to the tension of domestic actors wanting a different model of engagement from diaspora actors. It was argued by participants that the space provided for diaspora actors to organise impacts on their possible outcomes.

- **Environment in the country of heritage:** Similarly, different countries have different degrees of engagement with diaspora communities. This relationship tends to be more strategic and developed in development contexts, such as Pakistan where participants reported a relationship between diaspora and government, rather than in the Syrian context where the ongoing political instability and factionalism makes the same impossible.

[16] Based on key informant interviews- representatives of Muslim and other non faith-based diverse community led INGOs in the Global North. Country specific diaspora actors are typically perceived to exhibit greater proximity and connection with specific heritage countries, as per discussions with key informants, and for this reason the participation of this group in the FGDs was prioritised.

- **Operational modalities:** Throughout the consultation discussions this tended to relate to whether or not diaspora actors were primarily fundraisers, advocates or if they were implementers and how that operational role was viewed. The degree to which diaspora actors implement humanitarian programmes has an impact on the extent to which they are likely to engage with efforts to ´localise´ implementation. Operational modalities can be and often are mixed.
- **Fundraising modalities:** Diaspora actors might be loosely categorised as either reliant on community based fundraising, or on institutional funds. Community fundraising may be more associated with country specific diaspora humanitarian actors, but not exclusively, and they may be able to exercise a greater degree of flexibility in their ability to respond as a result. Having said that the total sums actors are able to raise in this way are considerably less than diaspora actors that are institutionally funded. Institutionally funded actors however are wedded to bureaucratic norms and donor priorities. It is important to note that fundraising modalities can also be mixed.
- **Structure / bureaucratisation:** This is in part connected to the kind of funds an actor received as to the structure of the organisation. A central theme throughout the discussions was on the emulation, or not, of the INGO. Some participants expressed a need to ´mature´ in order to sit at decision making tables and have an influence on donors and policy makers. Others however appealed for diaspora actors to distinguish themselves differently, not repeating the limitations of the INGO, bureaucratisation or the donor driven model. During the Syrian FGD, participants noted the change overtime from a diaspora volunteer based response to more formalised and organised entities. Further, with regards to internal structures, participants noted greater proximity to countries of heritage based on the number of locals on the board of diaspora organisations, as well as diaspora board presence in domestic entities (Somalia FGD). Blurring the lines between what constitutes local/domestic and diaspora. Further, it can also relate to where an organisation is registered, which may be for legal, operational or fundraising necessity, also having an impact on perspective and engagement.
- **Generational perspectives:** Generational differences relating to attitudes, interest, cultural understanding and knowledge, leverage held within resident countries, engagement with particular topics were all touched on throughout the discussions. This presented itself as another key variable influencing identity and engagement and will be visited in the following analysis.

Summary. Variables that impact on the perspectives and role of diaspora humanitarian actors include: Location; whether or not their remit is country specific; proximity and engagement with the aid system; type of response they engage in; experiences of migration including choice, timing, resident country environment; operational and fundraising modalities and degree of formality / bureaucratisation; generational differences.

2.2 The perceived value and contribution of diaspora humanitarian actors

Participants spoke highly of the role and contribution of diaspora actors across humanitarian, development and conflict related contexts. They highlighted the **direct and in-kind aid** that diasporas provide, noting diaspora access to funding sources and ability to engage with donors that domestic actors lack (Somalia FGD) and how this provides greater available resources for emergency responses. Funds were described as being channelled both through organisational entities and individuals. Participants commended diaspora contributions in terms of remittances, local community empowerment, the provision of economic opportunities, supporting development projects, and investing in businesses. The significance of remittances was described as a *"lifeline"* (Abdurahman Sharif, Internews Europe, Opening Session) and regarding non-formalised diaspora activities, a speaker in the opening session explained:

> "*There are few diaspora led organisations in Somalia, but millions of individuals from diaspora communities give it in monetary and other ways, which are sometimes many times more effective than formal institutions, they reach the real need, the real people and sectors most in need also,* ***very prompt and without judgement and preconceived perceptions****"* (Suleikha Ali Yusuf, ZamZam, Opening Session)

Contributors described the diaspora role beyond the provision of financial and material assistance, reminding that diaspora actors are also frontline responders, they have a role in information sharing and *"****offer their skills, their expertise and their networks****, particularly in times of crisis. They* ***assist with coordination, logistics and relief efforts****."* (Shahin Ashraf, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Opening Session) Where discussed, participants viewed complementary and gap filling roles, for example supporting the work of domestic actors with financial resources or training, favourably (Pakistan FGD).

Participants suggested that the roles of diasporas are also determined by what sectors they are involved in in their home countries as well as what is considered to be ´risk free´ and for Pakistan the education and health sectors were illustrated (Pakistan FGD). Further, keeping to a humanitarian focus was considered to be the easier choice for Syrian diaspora actors, due to the ease of reaching consensus on humanitarian needs rather than strategic broader efforts (Syria FGD). For Somalia, diasporas were also credited for having contributed significantly to the provision of health, education and water services (Somalia FGD).

Participants discussed how depending on the source of the funding diaspora actors were also often **able to respond more rapidly** and with comparatively less administrative costs than their INGO counterparts, with one respondent explaining:

> "*It is evidenced that diaspora can reach and support more efficiently their community in back home without the bureaucratic process that hamper mostly the international aid*" (Questionnaire response, UK/Somalia).

Another respondent explained *"Before any international organisations respond to crisis of famine and starvation and other crisis diaspora send anything they are able to contribute before major organisation support begins to shape"* (Questionnaire response, Turkey / Syria). This was also highlighted during the Somalia FGD as *"diaspora organisations seem to be proactive and more responsive"* in comparison to international and UN agencies.

Participants viewed diasporas generally as **better informed** about contexts in countries of heritage, owing to their access to local information and direct connection with people in the country. It was pointed out that understanding need was dependent on proximity, and Somali FGD participants considered diaspora and domestic actors to be more proximate to needs than international actors.

Of their **advocacy** role, participants also described diasporas as *"constituencies and voters. And by virtue of that can influence politicians and members of parliament."* (Abdurahman Sharif, Internews Europe, Opening Session). The advocacy role of diaspora actors based on their understanding both of countries of heritage and of residence enabled "*raising awareness of rights, advocacy and protection from exploitation and violence that may occur. Advocating for their (local/domestic) issues in their residence countries and governments and ensuring that their voices reach decision-making centres directly*" (Questionnaire response, Turkey /Syria).

Advocacy efforts for human rights were further described as motivated by the desire for *"their current countries of origin to be equal, to be fair, to provide their citizens with the basic services and human rights that they deserve."* (Themrise Khan, Independent analyst and researcher, Opening Session). The advocacy role was discussed during the Syrian FGD with the view that diaspora organisations act as spokespersons for Syrians when they are able to assume that role themselves. However this perception was also challenged during the opening session with the assertion that Syrian organisations were not doing enough in this regard. During the

Somali FGD participants pointed out that diaspora can advocate quite powerfully in countries of residence, especially considering the size of Somali diaspora constituencies.

The role of the diaspora in **supporting the accountability** of humanitarian decisions and responses was also highlighted. One speaker explained:

> "*When we started the campaign, the Syrian diaspora started asking where this is actually, and forced us to have more accurate data, to be more transparent, and more accurate. Camp where? Which city? Which village? Which neighbourhood? Who do you know there? They started also sharing with us names and locations and lists of people who could volunteer and help us.*" (Habib Rajeh, United Mission for Relief and Development, Opening Session)

Numerous respondents highlighted the unique **commitment** diasporas have for their country of heritage, sometimes seen *"as an extension of"* the same *"in supporting the steadfastness of their people who are in places of war or conflict."* (Questionnaire response, Turkey / Syria). One participant noted that this commitment *"to support their homeland in economic, social, political and humanitarian issues"* is there *"regardless of humanitarian aid"* (Questionnaire response, UK/Somalia). Another respondent described diasporas as *"ambassadors, working on preserving values and social traditions as well as contributing in the economic and social development of the home country"* and their role in defending the interests and *"intangible heritage of the homeland"* (Questionnaire response, Morocco). During the Syrian FGD participants commented that the commitment of diaspora organisations had been sustained in the 12 years since the beginning of the civil war and that enabled them to be ready to respond to the earthquake in 2022. Comparably, during the Pakistan FGD it was noted that diaspora actors traditionally more accustomed to delivering development oriented programmes, shifted attention to provide humanitarian relief during the floods of 2022 (Pakistan FGD).

Some described an **emotional connection and psychological support** that is offered by diasporas which "*enable these long lasting partnerships"* (Clara Chépeau, Shabaka, Opening Session). The emotional element of diaspora motivation arose numerous times during the consultation series. On the one hand it was credited as explaining the sustained commitment and drive to help until *´they see some kind of results´* (Pakistan FGD), but on the contrary some expressed the limitations of prioritised humanitarian or crisis driven ´emotional responses´ that overlooked longer term needs and efforts (Syria FGD).

Summary. Diaspora actors are recognised for: providing direct and in kind aid; sharing skills, expertise and networks; coordination and logistics related efforts; supporting the accountability of aid; and advocating for countries of heritage and respective needs. They are considered: to be able to respond more rapidly, without judgement and preconceptions; to be more informed and connected than INGO counterparts; and to provide emotional connection and psychological support.

2.3 Perceived weaknesses and problematic dynamics

Participants also drew attention to a number of problematic dynamics that need to be considered in connection to the role of diasporas. With regards to **biases in support provided**, during the opening session, participants heard how diaspora organisations that represent a specific ethnic or religious group may sometimes prioritise support for *"that same ethnic group in their countries of origin."* (Themrise Khan, Independent analyst and researcher, Opening Session). However, this was seen as problematic in the sense that it catered to a very specific group, while ignoring others, especially during an event like a disaster which

would affect many different communities in one location. At the same time, this was also an important strategy to help the more marginalised and discriminated minority communities who were in any case mostly left ignored by the majority. For FGD participants discussing the context of Somalia, it was noted that some communities are not well represented by the diaspora and this can have the impact of leaving some communities behind (Somalia FGD). In the Pakistan FGD political affiliation was said to influence engagement with the government, and political fragmentation was further discussed during the Syrian FGD in the context of how regional interference can prevent a unified diaspora effort.

Some participants described **cultural clashes** between diaspora and domestic actors, with some explaining how this can lead to solutions being prescribed befitting of the past or prescribing resident country solutions that lack applicability or relevance in the country of heritage (Pakistan FGD). Cultural clashes between diaspora and domestic actors were also raised in the Somalia FGD noting that domestic organisations had the advantage in terms of access, ability to deliver, and the trust placed in them by local communities (Somalia FGD). Cultural tensions were also discussed in connection to generational tendencies and in Somalia one participant contributed that the way older generation diasporas and second and subsequent generation diaspora engaged differed considerably. Whereas the expectation was that the older generation would bring positive lessons from the country of residence into play in Somalia, they found instead that they *"melted back into the traditions and pastoral way of thinking"* (Somalia FGD). Younger generations on the other hand were perceived to be able to provide an alternative approach.

During the opening session one speaker shared that in some instances domestic actors feel diaspora actors might seem **relatively disconnected** from the political and humanitarian realities in the countries of heritage due to their permanent residency elsewhere (Sofia Jarvis, DEMAC – Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination, Opening Session). During the Pakistan FGD this was pointed out with regards to diaspora actors' focus in the cities, skewing the domestic-diaspora connection to city contexts over rural ones (Pakistan FGD).

Internal issues of inequitable power dynamics was raised particularly noting gender inequity and hierarchical leadership,. It was emphasised that although we see several examples where diaspora empower female leadership and disrupt traditional stereotypes, *"Diaspora can on the other hand potentially contribute to entrenching patterns of marginalisation, exclusion and vulnerability. That's not something that can be ignored."* (Sofia Jarvis, DEMAC – Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination, Opening Session).

A number of other challenges described are similar to critiques of western INGOs in terms of proximity and models of operating. Throughout the consultation series the issue of the diaspora actors **replicating the INGO model and adopting the bureaucracies** of the same was critiqued (Fadi Al´Dairi, Opening Session) as was the adoption of the donor culture that diaspora actors are also impacted by (Dr. Haney ElBanna, WHAF, Opening Session).

Diaspora actors were also critiqued throughout the consultation for at times being **competitive, egotistical and individualistic**, and as a result not collaborating in the way in which was needed and desired: *"I'm not saying all, but there are many who are lacking the standardisation, the commitment, the understanding, the wanting to conform to have the unity and solidarity"* (Marwa Eissa, Takaful Al Sham, Opening Session, in reference to the context in Syria). In the case of Pakistan, one participant suggested that INGOs were better coordinated than diaspora actors, pointing out duplication and wasted resources as a result of **poor coordination** amongst diaspora actors.

Summary. Identified weaknesses of diaspora humanitarian response include: potential biases in support provided; cultural clashes and relative disconnect with countries of heritage; internal issues of inequitable power dynamics; replicating the INGO model; engaging competitively and individualistically; lacking coordination amongst them.

2.4 Perceptions on how diaspora and domestic actors currently work together

There was **considerable variation concerning the ways that diaspora and domestic actors viewed the working relationship between them**. The relationship between diaspora and domestic actors was viewed as positive when assuming a gap filling and supportive role, when diasporas act as spokespersons and advocates for domestic actors when they lack the ability to, when they build bridges between actors inside and outside of the country of heritage and where the proximity between actors was reduced. This might for example include where the lines between diaspora and domestic actors are blurred, as mentioned in section 2.1, where diaspora actors were country specific in focus, where diaspora actors were less formalised and more community driven, organised and connected. Whereas capital transfer through remittances demonstrates a very direct and connected relationship to individuals, larger, more formalised organisations seemed to be perceived as exhibiting greater degrees of removal and distance.

Opinions on models of partnership and the extent to which diaspora actors are ´doing localisation´ also varied. NEAR has defined localisation as "a process of changing the way support and solidarity are activated, designed, funded and delivered." and "a solution to ensure local communities and the local response systems that support them have the resources and agency to address the challenges that impact them."[17] For some however, the term localisation has a ´loaded´ meaning, "*where original ideas of the locals, again another loaded word, are taken and bagged and used to create new frameworks for self-preservation"* (Suleikha Ali Yusuf, ZamZam, Opening Session) and speakers also described how practices such as nationalising local offices adopt the term disingenuously. Further, in a piece for the Guardian, Themrise Khan has previously explained:

> "*The northern myth that everyone is a beneficiary in the south must be challenged, as must the narrative of "localisation". No one in the south is a "local". We are natives of our own countries and aid professionals of the south must push back as being viewed as such by their northern counterparts.*"[18]

During these discussions, localisation and the principles as defined by NEAR were discussed, as was the role of diaspora actors in supporting the same. The extent to which this consultation indicated a general finding that diaspora actors are ´doing localisation´ more than INGOs is inconclusive - perhaps contrary to other recent studies that say so[19] - although both can be true. Whilst it is likely to be closer to the case, owing to proximity, community connections, sustained commitment and the blurred line between diaspora and local/domestic actors, it seemed during the series that there was an admission that diaspora discourse on and commitment to localisation principles and local partnerships, whilst needed, were lacking. This was particularly apparent in the way FGDs conversations progressed into considerations on what the desired role of diaspora humanitarian actors are, as implementers, advocates or funding partners, indicating - through a statement of what needs to be - what is missing.

During informant interviews individuals representing diaspora (or diverse community led) (I)NGOs (whether they worked in one or multiple countries) shared the view that there was a lack of engagement with ´localisation´ principles and discussions.[20] Instead behaviour similar to those critiqued against the INGO were witnessed, where diaspora actors rush to be seen to be delivering rather than channel their support and funding through domestic actors and partners.

Challenges experienced by diaspora actors in partnering with domestic actors were cited to be the number of and lack of prioritisation amongst domesticl organisations, meaning contending with *"too many voices, and*

[17] NEAR, NEAR Localisation Policy, accessed 06.11.23

[18] Themrise Khan, Racism doesn't just exist within aid. It's the structure the sector is built on, 31.August 2021.

[19] Shabaka, Delivering Localisation, lessons from diaspora humanitarians, 2023

[20] Based on key informant interviews with representatives of diaspora (or diverse community led) NGOs.

scattered voices" (Habib Rajeh, United Mission for Relief and Development, Opening Session). Further, diaspora organisations have limited resources to invest in capacity building and developing their coordination with domestic organisations (Habib Rajeh, United Mission for Relief and Development, Opening Session).

Having said that, a range of perspectives were put forward, including **positive examples of collaborative partnerships**. For example Sudanese diaspora matching displaced Sudanese with employment. Another example where diaspora actors have demonstrated taking a supportive, gap filling and complementary role is illustrated by:

> "*I think we've seen several cases where diaspora have been extremely complimentary and seen themselves in a supporting role to local actors. One example is following the earthquake that affected northwest Syria, many of the Diaspora members that were outside of Turkey and Syria were unaffected. And they saw that some of the NGOs and the more kind of established Syrian organisations were not able to respond because they had been so affected. And they therefore took on a role … of doing what the local responders could not. And then as soon as they were again, able to get on their feet, then they took a role of okay, what can we do to support you in the response that you're leading?"* (Sofia Jarvis, DEMAC – Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination, Opening Session).

It was also suggested that of the partnerships that are established between diaspora and domestic actors, they are possibly longer lasting, more flexible to the needs of domestic actors and more open to working across the ´nexus´ in comparison to the INGO and this was backed up by the desire of participants throughout the FGDs to not be limited to discussions on humanitarianism only. During the Pakistan FGD participants spoke favourably of diaspora domestic partnerships over partnerships with INGOs crediting shared culture and the dedication of diaspora actors (Pakistan FGD).

The need to establish trust, and **varying perspectives on the current state of trust** between diaspora and domestic actors was raised routinely throughout the consultation. During the FGDs, establishing trust and political divisions was cited as a challenge to working together (Syria FGD) and offered as an explanation for the tendency of diaspora actors to work in isolation (Pakistan FGD). As emphasised by a speaker during the opening session:

> "*Another challenge that I have seen is establishing trust, either in the community that we are in, or in the local communities that we operate."* (Ammar Aqlan, United Mission for Relief and Development, Opening Session)

During the Somalia FGD the notion of trust was considered more in relation to what is held with civil society and it was pointed out that whilst both domestic and diaspora actors were trusted more than the international community, it was domestic actors that had a clear edge. It was also noted that there are generational differences in trust, with older generations tending to be more wary of diaspora actors than younger generations. Also during the Somalia FGD, **competition over resources** was raised as an obstacle to positive diaspora and domestic relationships. Noting that whilst domestic actors welcomed the efforts of diaspora actors:

> "*Where it becomes a bit challenging is when the diaspora organisations are conceived to be competing for resources"* (Somalia FGD participant).

It was highlighted that this is compounded by the fact that domestic actors struggled to access funding and competition amongst them is already high. And this sense of competition between diasporas and locals was also discussed with regards to positions held and the unfair advantage diasporas have in accessing roles within the UN, international organisations and government.

Importantly, with regards to the relationship between diaspora and domestic actors, it was noted that *"The focus continues to be in competing for resources"*, which *"creates more dis-harmony than being able to work together to change the system."* (Somalia FGD participant).

Summary: Perceptions on how domestic and diaspora organisations currently work together varied, and there were different takes on the trust that is held between the two. Positive examples of collaborative partnerships were cited, as was the issue of competing over resources and the challenges of establishing partnerships.

2.5 Critiques of aid and challenges faced by diaspora humanitarian actors

Discussions throughout the consultation aired grievances both with the aid system and the interconnected operational challenges and barriers experienced by domestic and diaspora actors.

Concerning the limits of aid generally, in the context of both surging humanitarian needs and new and growing challenges (for example the impact of AI and climate change) (opening session) participants recognised the international aid system as self-serving, unethical and creating **dependency** on handouts, *"unrooted in the realities of people"* (Suleikha Ali Yusuf, ZamZam, Opening Session).

Citing the example of government expulsion of INGOs, a participant during the Pakistan discussion also advised that "*if we depend too much on International NGOs we become a bit vulnerable*" (Pakistan FGD participant).

The limits of humanitarian aid were raised repeatedly with frequent mention to **the narrow and therefore limiting lens of humanitarian engagement** that avoids root causes, structural issues and is divorced from longer term efforts. For example the ongoing prioritisation of food baskets over investing in creating employment opportunities was heavily critiqued in the Syria context. Describing the confinement of diaspora engagement to humanitarianism, despite the role of the diaspora in other arenas, a participant during the Syrian FGD said:

> "*Always we are restricted to these platforms of the UN - that always like to give humanitarian touch for everything, otherwise there is coordination between diasporas in humanitarian, legal work, it is taking its place and there are open channels amongst the diasporas between different channels, multiple level work like supporting new coming refugees in the hosting societies."*(Syria FGD participant)

This was echoed during the Somali discussion, where a participant reflected on the treadmill of humanitarianism, commenting: *"There is that narrative of humanitarian aid for how long? I think that is also a very serious reflection and discussion"* (Somalia FGD participant). Another participant considered the way international actors see needs:

> "*I think for thirty years to have the same type of need is a bit, in the sense, silly and obsolete. And being on the ground you realise there are other bigger needs that the country needs in terms of infrastructure development"* (Somalia FGD participant).

Furthermore regarding the provision of aid by donors which also have **military and strategic objectives** within the same country, a participant explained:

> "*Those who are engaged in the political crisis who are also engaged militarily, they are the same as the big donors UK and US, always they are our donors - and they are security council member states, and they have forces on the ground. Both are part of the problem at the same time."* (Syria FGD participant).

Donor preferences and biases were also described as driving decision making over actual needs (Marwa Eissa, Takaful Al Sham, Opening Session). This hampered partnerships and needed programmes where diaspora and domestic actors wanted to engage in and therefore restricted the locations that organisations could work in. (Syria FGD participant) Connecting unsustainable dependency on international aid and donor restrictions, one Syrian participant explained:

> "*Defacto forces were not created by us and we cannot work in those areas without coordinating with them. When the UN is not going to continue in place forever."* (Syria FGD participant)

On coloniality, speakers during the opening session reminded participants of the persevering presence of colonial attitudes within the aid system:

> "*While the era of formal colonialism may be over, its echoes persist in our attitudes in our policies, and our approaches to international aid. But the colonial mindset is not a relic of the past. It continues to manifest itself in subtle and not so subtle ways. It's present when we assume that Western solutions are superior to indigenous knowledge."* (Shahin Ashraf, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Opening Session).

This was discussed in terms of the way information is presented, for example the focus on resource flows from the Global North to Global South, and how it ignores both the significance of remittances and the funds coming from donors in the Global South. It was further pointed out that this is a mentality that both diaspora actors and domestic Global South actors have and need to overcome, this means domestic actors *"feel more satisfied, if we are invited by Northern organisations, Northern framework, to get engaged"* rather than acknowledging that the solutions are instead in the Global South, and that *"being reactive to them is not helping us to take the situation in our control and seek solutions"* (Sudhanshu S. Singh, Humanitarian Aid International / A4EP, Opening Session). The need to ´decolonise´ this mindset, that looked up to the Global North, was put forward in order to enable a greater appreciation of both South-South collaboration and diaspora-domestic collaboration.

Challenges faced by diaspora actors also included the challenges experienced by domestic organisations and the **limited access to institutional funds and coordination mechanisms**. It was suggested that greater standardisation would move actors closer to the goal of receiving institutional funding and that a maturation process for diaspora actors was necessary in order to *"allow us to be peers to other international organisations."* (Habib Rajeh, United Mission for Relief and Development, Opening Session). Rather, the diaspora voice was described as shaky and lacking the strength needed to lobby and advocate for the Global South at institutional and policy making levels.

Purported localisation efforts were also critiqued throughout the consultation series, as noted above in section 2.4 and continued in 3.2 during the discussion on desired relationships. Relative to both the experience of local and diaspora organisations, participants shared that "*The international NGOs are not giving up any space"* noting their reluctance to share power and leadership (Syria FGD). The same sentiment was reiterated by a questionnaire respondent, who explained that:

> "*International actors have been reluctant so far to work collaboratively with diaspora organisations to reduce such bureaucratic processes which is hampering to reach the needy people on time and minimise the administrative costs which can increase the resources that can reach the needy communities."* (Questionnaire response, UK/ Somalia)

Connected to conversations on commitment and emotional connection, the unique **emotional toll** diaspora actors experience was also described:

> "*The emotional toll that this kind of work, or the humanitarians take with them as they are working in this field. Having this sense of guilt, when there is inability to respond to a crisis that is to a country that is close to them, or the country of origin.*" (Ammar Aqlan, United Mission for Relief and Development, Opening Session)

Operational challenges experienced by diaspora actors and cited throughout the series included the navigation of complex cultural norms, local government bureaucracies and regulatory hurdles in countries of heritage; the lack of commitment to and investment in coordination mechanisms (Syria FGD); how organisations are becoming increasingly restricted by bureaucracy (Syria FGD); the perception that diaspora actors lack neutrality (Abdurahman Sharif, Internews Europe, Opening Session) and the issue of restrictions on money transfers. This last point was raised a number of times with considerations for how it impacts on the immediate transfer of funds and the ability to work with domestic partners. In specific reference to Sudan, Syria, Pakistan and during the opening session, Palestine:

> "*So there are many Palestinians in the diaspora who are willing and happy to support the organisation. But the issue with money transfer, to being put in a blacklist for whatever different reasons, which also again, putting a lot of strain on this organisation being able to raise funds.*" (Participant, Opening Session)

In light of the above mentioned critiques and challenges, participants discussed the **positionality of diaspora engagement**, and whether or not it was perceived to be part of the aid system. In explaining the separation between the international system and local efforts (and in this case local refers to both local and diaspora actors), one speaker shared that:

> "*In a context like Somalia, my experience has been two parallel systems working with each other. One that is dominated by the international community and one that is dominated by locals. And the two systems do not trust each other.*" (Abdurahman Sharif, Internews Europe, Opening Session)

This was echoed by a questionnaire respondent who explained the commitment of the Somali diaspora in supporting their homeland *"regardless of the international aid*" (Questionnaire response, UK / Somalia). During the FGD another participant shared the same sentiment, asserting that *"diaspora are part of a parallel aid system for sure"* (Somalia FGD participant). The same participant considered it to be a positive thing, citing *"global inequitable systems"* and continuing:

> "*I think the current aid system that is built around international development, where what country x gives to country y has its flaws and challenges and having an alternative where we have the diaspora for a parallel way of giving within a parallel system is very encouraging and at times probably offers a lot of lifesaving support"* (Somalia FGD participant).

A concern however was raised and discussed with regards to the sustainability of such a parallel system. With participants wondering whether or not the second and subsequent generation diaspora would take up the baton and continue their work. It was emphasised that for this reason too, multi-generational engagement was required.

Summary. Aid was critiqued to be: narrow in focus and therefore limiting; creating dependency; influenced by military and strategic priorities of donors and therefore also donor preferences and biases; imbued with a colonial mindset. Participants experience: limited access to funding and coordination mechanisms; operational challenges; an unique emotional toll; and for some, a position of operating outside of the international aid system.

3: Working together - A vision

"*Finding the right model of collaboration, I think, is something that still needs to be defined in my opinion."* (Somalia FGD participant).

3.1 Working together on what?

Throughout the consultation the critiques levelled at the aid sector were discussed to be both operational hindrances to the delivery of humanitarian aid and partnerships for the same, and, obstructing the bigger picture of what people, diaspora and domestic actors, actually wanted to work on together. During the opening, it was articulated that the ´colonial mindset´ and looking up to the ´Northern´ model was obstructing envisioning own (Global South) solutions and (diaspora) support for the same. During the Syrian discussion we heard how donor restrictions and prescriptions prevented the creation of a strategic plan for the whole of Syria and the ability of humanitarian actors to work with a longer term vision. The Somali discussion echoed the same, that the siloing of humanitarian aid restricted actors from being able to work on the bigger picture of what is needed, which included infrastructure, the provision of services, economic and livelihood related needs (Also echoed in the Syrian discussion), and addressing underlying causes such as climate change.

As one participant stated:

"*We need to think outside of the humanitarian topic"* (Syria FGD participant)

And another in the separate Somalia FGD mirrored:

"*It´s not only about cash transfers and food distribution and providing enough food items and that´s it. No, they need actually much more than that"* (Somalia FGD participant)

The discussions therefore sought to identify what diaspora and domestic actors wanted to work on together and a range of topics were put forward that demonstrated this expanded perception of role.

During the opening session, it was asserted that:

"*Our (Global South) primary work is* ***to lead the process of transformation****."* (Sudhanshu S. Singh, Humanitarian Aid International / A4EP, Opening Session).

This perception of the role of civil society as the primary agents of change was also shared during the Syrian FGD, and it was asserted that diaspora and domestic collaboration was required for the *"rebuilding of civil society structures", that should be done "from the bottom up, well governed and built on real partnerships."* (Syria FGD). Civil society, or domestic actors, it was reiterated, *"are not someone to implement our ideas, they are the basic part of rebuilding the state"* (Syria FGD).

For some this process of transformation was about **changing the underlying conditions** that lead to aid:

"*But, and actually, why do we wish to reform it? (the aid system) Why not circumvent it and go back to our old ways of helping one another and adapt them to the new realities we are living? We've abandoned ourselves for too long. It is time to reevaluate, revisit, revalue the wisdom, wisdom of our ancestors, the lived philosophies"* (Suleikha Ali Yusuf, ZamZam, Opening Session)

For others, it also meant the development of a comprehensive and **strategic vision and approach** to address causes and meet needs in the long term. This was a central focus of the Syrian FGD and another questionnaire respondent also contributed that the value of working together meant to them: *"setting aside factional*

interests and by turning to absent but important strategic issues." (Questionnaire response Turkey /Syria). During the FGD Syrians spoke enthusiastically about the role of the Syrian diaspora in other areas such as the legal, civil and political sectors and that working together to address humanitarian needs also required connecting all of these efforts in a **comprehensive and multisectoral** way. This was also put forward in a questionnaire response which in addition to filling immediate gaps, **capacity building and preparation** for *"the fall of dictatorial regimes"* working together also meant: *"networking with other groups to maximise the impact"* (Questionnaire response, Turkey / Syria).

Respondents also connected strategic efforts and processes of desired transformation with **understanding and challenging global systems of inequality**. The topics of importance for one questionnaire respondent included *"World financial, trade infrastructure. French neocolonialism. The use of social media in rigging elections and inciting hate."* Seeing as important, *"Providing better understanding of the actual situation facing communities due to inequities in world financial and trade architecture, IMF, WB, WTO, TRIPS, SWIFT system, corporate control of food production and distribution."* (Questionnaire response, Australia/Malaysia).

It was also proposed that diaspora and domestic actors needed to work together to **address future challenges**: *"It's essential to kind of recognise that the world is changing rapidly. And the way that we work together in this sector must also evolve accordingly"* (Shahin Ashraf, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Opening Session). This means recognising geopolitical shifts, addressing existing and foreseeable climate change impacts including recognising climate refugees, and understanding the risks of technological advancements - particularly the intersection of AI algorithms, diasporic communities and digital redlining and the impact of the same on exacerbating inequalities.

Many participants addressed the desire to work together more on **intergenerational engagement and mobilisation** and different organisations shared the ways in which they were doing this already, from engaging with university students to creating forums and exchanges between second and subsequent generation diaspora with local forums. Understanding that exchanges should be viewed as mutually beneficial (for example diaspora benefiting from language, cultural and social learning) was also raised a couple of times during the series.

Further, whereas some viewed the link between the diaspora and the country of heritage as weakening across the generations (opening session) or being a challenge to sustain (Somalia FGD) others felt that greater engagement could offer different perspectives and bring in the strengths of the younger generations. Second and subsequent generations were discussed to share a different connection with countries of residence, in terms of familiarity and ease with norms and institutions, enjoy potentially greater access to political spaces and spaces of power, possess a higher level of technological literacy and the ability to form transnational networks (Clara Chépeau, Shabaka, Opening Session).

Whilst addressing these structural, root and future issues for the purpose of long term transformative change were the primary preoccupation of participants in terms of working together, transforming inequities present in the aid system was also part of the conversations. One respondent for example said that it was important to: *"bring **ways to challenge traditional aid models** that perpetuate dependency and cultural hegemony and discuss approaches to ensure that aid efforts are driven by local agency and reflect the priorities of the communities they aim to support."* (Questionnaire response, Kenya/Somalia).

For many people then, the localisation of aid was an important objective of working together and perspectives concerning the same will be shared in the following section on desired partnerships.

Summary. Diaspora and domestic actors want to work together on: the process of transformation (of needs, root causes, of society, underlying causes); creating strategic visions and approaches; addressing future challenges; and capacity building and preparation. They want to do this in a way that: is comprehensive and multisectoral; challenges global systems of inequality; is intergenerational; and provides alternatives to traditional aid models.

3.2 The desired characteristics of partnership

Noting the discussion in section 2.4 demonstrating that various perspectives are held concerning the extent to which diaspora organisations are ´doing **localisation**´ many respondents felt that diaspora solidarity with domestic actors in the Global South *is* implicitly about localisation, collaborating with local/domestic partners and directly supporting locally led and owned projects *"for long lasting empowerment"* (Chat respondent, Opening Session). One response received urged that *"Diaspora solidarity should come through honest and good will localization of aid."* (Questionnaire response, Italy / Somalia and Somaliland), another emphasised local/domestic collaboration for coordination: *"Diaspora can play a vital role in resources mobilisation and can be coordinated with the local organisations"* (Questionnaire response, Somalia), and another spoke to the relationship between supporting localisation with achieving longer term impact:

> "*The diaspora solidarity could understand the ground realities and local governance/system. Further, emphasize localization in a systematic way for long-term outcomes."* (Questionnaire response, Pakistan).

During the Pakistan FGD a participant responded that diaspora actors *"need to be bridged with local actors, so they can respond in a much more efficient way"* (Pakistan FGD participant). And in the Somalia context local partners were recognised as having extensive competence and experience, less operational costs, and a greater readiness than international actors, advising that the development of partnerships itself should be a locally led process (Somalia FGD). Even those who felt that diaspora actors were already working in ways that adhered to the objectives of localisation noted that:

> "*It's constantly in need of improvement and investment. But this is like practice, that maybe require some improvements. When we talk about, have we formalised our actions that we are we doing? Are we better engaged together? I would like to see better engagement."* (Fadi Al´Dairi, Hand in Hand for Aid and Development, Opening Session)

These admissions of what was needed came with the reminder of the barriers to the same, particularly on the impact of banking restrictions that impede the transfer of funding to local partners as well as on the lengthy screening processes that are required before partnerships can be approved (Fadi Al´Dairi, Hand in Hand for Aid and Development, Opening Session). Further, the suggestion was well received that *"A South-South conversation should be on to understand what kind of localisation really the GS-GN Diaspora can do in order to bridge the two worlds."* (Participant, Opening Session).

For some, the role of diasporas in ´doing localisation´ was clearly about **supporting civil society**:

> "*But here emerges the role of diaspora not looking for formal setup, but in finding ways out to start rebuilding civil society organizations. And that would be real localization."* (Marwa Eissa, Takaful Al Sham, Opening Session re. Syria context)

And this was echoed during the Syrian FGD, that as earlier described, placed Syrian civil society at the centre of real change. As one participant put it:

> *"So let's think when we implement projects, not to ask for data collectors but on rebuilding civil society structures. They are the real change factor - we need to rebuild the structure of civil work. Need to think how to build from the bottom up, these systems to be active, well governed, built on real partnerships"* (Syria FGD participant).

Supporting civil society led change was considered to be crucial in ensuring that diaspora **support long term impact.** Because as one respondent put it *"Sustainable impact requires a long-term commitment. Diaspora engagement should extend beyond short-term projects, focusing on building enduring relationships that foster continuous growth and development."* (Questionnaire response, Kenya / Somalia). Another respondent considered diaspora engagement to be effective when they "*build long-term issue based partnerships with*

local, active, right-based organisations." which they considered important for sustainable development, noting "*aid for welfare programmes does not leave much impact."* (Questionnaire response, Pakistan).

The desired diaspora partnership was also described in terms of how diaspora actors can **support Global South / domestic born solutions**:

> "*It's about recognising that solutions to global challenges often emerge from within communities themselves. It's those who are affected, they will be the ones to deal with the challenges. It's about listening to local voices and respecting local agency."* (Shahin Ashraf, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Opening Session).

This was reiterated clearly by another speaker:

> "*This is how we are trying to seek solutions within India, not relying on international actors to seek solutions for us. We know from our experience, it's seven years plus, that the international system is not going to change for us, they will keep talking about localization. Without meaning much about that. We local actors have to take the situation in our control and seek solutions, and we look up to the diaspora to support us in our endeavours in our respective countries."* (Sudhanshu S. Singh, Humanitarian Aid International / A4EP, Opening session)

Supporting civil society in countries of heritage and their emerging solutions was put forward as **supporting alternatives to the replication of northern models**. This was spoken about both in terms of the desired structures of civil society / local entities as well as the organisational structures of the diaspora actor. It was also described as the need to: *"break away from the straitjacket of donor/recipient relationships and embrace genuine partnerships"* (Shahin Ashraf, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Opening Session). Connecting the colonial mindset and the preference for replicating Global North models and organisations with the loss of valuable local characteristics, a revival was called for, implying *"a lot of informality":*

> "*How can we go back to that informality, not through this current formal aid architecture? We need a different setup, informal setup to support this revival of civil society movement. And that can be done through support from diaspora… how can we help with engagement of diaspora revival of the old civil society movement, which is more solution centric, which is more for the well being of the people, then just receiving funds and utilising and filing audit report?"* (Sudhanshu S. Singh, Humanitarian Aid International / A4EP, Opening Session)

Similarly, another speaker proposed the same need to re-evaluate, *"to go back to step back and say, really, what do we have, as, you know, in our cultures in our, in our worldview."* (Suleikha Ali Yusuf, ZamZam, Opening Session). Meanwhile, speaking on the perception of diaspora organisations that follow and copy the current system, *"but just copied with all of its problems"*, participants were invited to consider that:

> "*Following the root of the INGOs system in the aid system is, I think, something that is or should absolutely not do, because we don't want a replacement to the aid system that will look exactly like the aid system, except somebody else is doing it. We want something that is challenging the current aid system."* (Themrise Khan, Independent analyst and researcher, Opening Session).

And another speaker also questioned: *"how can we make diaspora engagement not repudiate reproducing the humanitarian aid system that is being criticised or at least analysed?"* suggesting that **reciprocal relationships** is part of the answer: *"And I think the term of reciprocity is very important. How can we make sure that you have a shared power."* (Clara Chépeau, Shabaka, Opening Session). Mutuality was emphasised by another speaker, envisaging that: *"partnerships will be built on mutual respect, shared responsibilities and a commitment to social justice."* (Shahin Ashraf, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Opening Session).

Summary. Partnerships between diaspora and domestic actors are desired to prioritise: localisation principles; supporting and strengthening civil society actors; local solutions and alternatives to existing international aid models. They are desired to support long term impact and be reciprocal.

3.3 The desired specific roles for diaspora actors

In addition to the recommendations that were received regarding what diaspora actors can support, there were also significant contributions delineating the specific roles that diasporas should then take on themselves. Whereas *"The local organisations are the one that point out inequities in the structures and also suggest doable solutions"* (Questionnaire response, Pakistan), frequently, the role of **diaspora as advocates** was promoted, specifically for raising awareness and putting pressure on donors (Questionnaire response, UK/ Syria) calling for engagement in common advocacy messages on causes that include both global and regional causes (Questionnaire response, Canada / Egypt / Turkey), keeping issues in view and advocating for strategic responses (Questionnaire response, Turkey / Syria), as well as bringing attention to the situation of IDPs and refugees:

> "*Actions speak louder than words, through petitions, advocacy, and lobbying can we begin to challenge inequitable structures from the root."* (Questionnaire response, UK / Jordan)

In the Syria context, it was put forward that diaspora actors were not seen to be doing enough to support domestic advocacy needs, and diaspora platforms and access to media channels needed to be more significantly offered and utilised (Marwa Eissa, Takaful Al Sham, Opening Session).

Of course, diaspora as **direct funders** of domestic actors was also frequently suggested across the series, with a participant noting during the Somalia FGD that due to the poor access to funding domestic actors experience, there could be greater collaboration with diaspora actors for capital transfer (Somalia FGD participant). It was further explained that Somalia lacks *"the culture of diaspora organisations and local organisations partnering"* due to the preference for INGO partnerships because of their access to greater funding, musing that a mutual understanding of the potential of the partnership needed to be further developed. The participant further commented:

> "*Imagine if the Somali diaspora actors or organisations were able to access resources in the same way? I think that would also kind of reset the benefit in terms of partnering between local and diaspora organisations"* (Somalia FGD participant).

Conversations on the role of diaspora actors as funders prompted questions on how to develop trust and credibility in order to access funding partnerships. One questionnaire respondent for example asked: *"How can an organisation created by a group of local community or refugees be trusted and access funds and connection to developed countries."* (Questionnaire response, Uganda/DRC). One respondent advised that *"Accountability and transparency are crucial in this partnership"* and called for mutual accountability mechanisms for both sides of the partnership (Questionnaire response, Pakistan). On the development of trust, building the connections with each other was recommended, with the advice that:

> "*There is a trust deficit in conflict affected states. Everything revolves around that. Trust is built through the interconnection between people, the more people engage, the more they trust each other."* (Abdurahman Sharif, Internews Europe, Opening Session)

Another speaker discussed the need for diaspora organisations to support local/domestic organisations in building their branding and credibility:

> *"They're still not able to contribute for various reasons, because local NGOs have credibility issues, visibility issues, branding issues. So diaspora can help identify such local organisations and help in brand building, start trusting and start channelling funds to them."* (Sudhanshu S. Singh, Humanitarian Aid International / A4EP, Opening Session).

Diaspora actors were also seen as important **connecters** *"by leveraging their networks, resources, and knowledge, diasporas can contribute to sustainable development on a grassroots level."* (Questionnaire

response, Kenya / Somalia). Another respondent remarked *"We as actors cannot reach anywhere without connection, this the place of diaspora."* (Questionnaire response, Uganda / Democratic Republic of Congo). It was also echoed in the Syrian FGS with a participant advising:

> "*Need to build bridges between Syrians within the country and those outside and that´s the role of the diaspora."* (Syria FGD participant).

This connecting, or bridging, role of the diaspora was also about **filling knowledge and skills gaps**, particularly ensuring that the knowledge is contextually relevant. Diaspora actors were seen as potentially crucial partners in **supporting activities that went beyond immediate humanitarian relief**, advocating for and supporting needed transitions to development (Questionnaire response, Somalia), early recovery and livelihoods provision (Questionnaire response, UK / Syria).

Summary. The desired roles identified for diaspora actors included: advocating; fundraising and directly funding domestic partners and solutions; connecting; filling knowledge and skills gaps; and supporting activities that went beyond immediate humanitarian relief.

3.4 Collective, coordinated, strategic efforts

Beyond individual and operational partnerships, participants also discussed the need for diaspora and domestic actors to work together in a more coordinated and strategic way, whether that be country, regional and / or inter-diaspora coordination. **Spaces for dialogue, meeting, connecting, sharing, strategising together were considered invaluable**, and respondents offered that in order *"to improve linkages between diaspora organisations and local actors/NGOs such forums need to be regular"* (Chat participant, Opening Session). Participants were reminded that the vision for what strategic solidarity might look like is not going to be one thing, rather:

> "*It's not just one holistic, you know, mode of solidarity that we're looking at, we're looking at a lot of different outcomes, we're looking at a lot of different agendas."* (Themrise Khan, Independent analyst and researcher, Opening Session).

The proposed outcomes reflected exactly this, varying perspectives influenced by the positionalities and agendas of the different diaspora and domestic actors who participated.

Direct coordination between local/domestic and diaspora actors was suggested multiple times during the series, one response received for example noted the positive impact of coordination on responses:

> "*Good collaboration and coordination between local actors and diaspora communities to collectively respond to climatic shocks such persistent droughts and flushing floods experiencing in Somalia"* (Questionnaire response, Kenya/Somalia).

During the Syrian FGD one role of diasporas was identified as *"to establish a common space for Syrians"* to enable strategic efforts (that seek to support civil society rebuilding, develop a common vision and a take a multi-sectoral approach to Syrian needs). This was discussed within the context of political interference experienced by Syrians in the region, and the suggestion that such a space could be better created and hosted by the diaspora outside of the region. Some thought this would require something new, but others suggested using and investing in the spaces and forums that already exist (Syria FGD). Citing restrictions and limitations, one participant proposed to further:

> "*Discuss how to build local coordination mechanisms, to be independent from the international UN mechanisms. Because during the earthquake we were paralysed. We are not able to work with local governments"* (Syria FGD participant)

During the Pakistan discussion coordination between domestic and diaspora actors for the purpose of visioning change was similarly proposed, as a participant suggested *"bringing together the actors who really want to see Pakistan change and really bringing them around the table to see how best we can work together"* (Pakistan FGD participant). It was also emphasised that such spaces and efforts for dialogue and mutual sharing and understanding needed to be **locally led**, which participants did not think currently existed:

> "*(it) has to be led from Pakistan, and meeting with key actors and saying ´how best can we collaborate?´"* (Pakistan FGD participant).

The same was put forward again during the Somalia FGD, where spaces and events that fostered collaboration, networking and mutual knowledge exchange were proposed. These spaces it was recommended should be sustainable and ready, not only triggered during an emergency, preferably in-person, and ideally held in Somalia.

During the consultation series, some suggested that coalitions enabled actors to have a more powerful voice (Clara Chépeau, Shabaka, Opening Session) which can be applied to all of the desired roles outlined for diaspora actors and particularly in terms of fundraising and advocacy. Participants also noted that efforts to build coalitions are about having greater long term impact:

> "*We should not only have solidarity when emergency strikes. We need to work on building strong networks and communities who are always working towards providing long-term aid."* (Questionnaire response, UK / Jordan).

It was put forward also that there is a **need for diaspora actors to be better connected and represented within the aid systems coordination mechanisms**:

> "*I think this is where we should actually have a stronger advocacy, or advocate strongly to have more share and be part of the coordination … It's not only the fault of institutions, as the diaspora led organisation or local organisation, we actually still don't really participate in coordination meetings, for example, the clusters, the working groups, the UN forums...it seems that we're actually excluding ourselves from the decision making process.*" (Habib Rajeh, United Mission for Relief and Development, Opening Session).

At the same time, it was emphasised that these mechanisms also needed to be more actively inclusive, but that nonetheless, a major strength of the diaspora was considered to be the potential to advocate at policy and institutional levels (Sofia Jarvis, DEMAC – Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination, Opening Session). Throughout the consultation series opportunities to strengthen collaboration with existing forums, such as NEAR and START were also promoted.

Working together to create a database (Chat participant, Opening Session) and share information about each other *"Each according to specialisation, to learn about the challenges of rest, and exchange knowledge about humanitarian work"* (Questionnaire response, Sudan / UAE), was also raised as an important element of coordinating collaboration between diaspora and domestic actors. With data collected also representing diaspora funding opportunities and local actors:

> "*The data reporting platforms should include diaspora funding also so that it can be adequately acknowledged. It's important that the recipients of diaspora funding are local and national actors, not*

international actors. Diaspora platforms should identify platforms of local actors in their countries of heritage and collaborate not only for funding but help address the problems and reshape the civil society architecture." (Sudhanshu S. Singh, HAI, India)

The importance of **committing to and investing in coordinating and coalition efforts**, particularly in order to be sustainable and impactful in the longer term, was raised (Syria FGD). Coordination between diaspora and domestic actors was therefore perceived as valuable for the objectives of facilitating responses in a more effective way, for creating collective voice in order to have greater impact advocating for change at a policy and institutional level, and as a space to explore and incubate common perceptions on the vision for change and the strategies needed to get there.

Summary: Diaspora and domestic actors want to work together in a collaborative and coordinated way. Space is desired for dialogue, connecting, exchanging and strategising. Coordination should be direct - between domestic and diaspora actors and should be locally led. Improved coordination with international coordination mechanisms was also desired, as was working together for information generation. The need for commitment and investment in such efforts was also recognised.

4: Conclusion

The diaspora and local/domestic actors that contributed to this consultation series consistently recognised the value and contributions each other offered. Domestic actors were consistently acknowledged in terms of their knowledge, proximity, legitimacy and efficiency when it comes to their roles meeting the needs of their communities and countries, but also in regards to the primary role they play in leading transformative change. It is clear that participants felt this was the ultimate objective and the need for aid to be locally owned and led was undisputed.

Diaspora actors have been appreciated for their contributions in both humanitarian and development contexts, both as formal entities and with regards to the significance of the remittances they send home (noted in section 2.2 and under the discussion concerning coloniality in 2.5, but surprisingly not more often than this), as well as the roles they play in fundraising, advocacy, the contribution of their skills, expertise and networks and their ability to support the accountability of aid. They are further considered to be better connected and informed than their INGO counterparts, demonstrate greater commitment and endurance, are able to respond more quickly and display less judgement and preconceptions.

At the same time, challenges were also shared such as how political or ethnicity based biases of diaspora actors can sometimes influence their engagement, their own inequitable internal power dynamics, their own lack of unity / collaborative ethic and engagement in individualistic and competitive positioning. It was further recognised that whilst proximity and knowledge with regards to countries of heritage is greater than their INGO counterparts, there still can be a relative disconnect and a cultural clash experienced which can lead to solutions that are not contextually relevant and cognisant of the changes the country in question has undergone. There seemed to be a generational dynamic to this observation and that whilst there was a fear that the role of first generation diaspora cannot be sustained without the greater engagement of second and subsequent diasporas, there was also a perception that younger generations may be able to offer something different.

The ways in which domestic and diaspora actors currently work together varied. There was no singular narrative on whether or not diaspora actors (both country specific and diaspora led actors), currently ´do localisation´ but a recognition that that was what they needed to be doing. Sometimes the diaspora - local relationships that were referred to were viewed as longer lasting due to the unique commitment factor of the diaspora, and they were also considered to be more flexible and more open to working across the ´nexus.´ Relationships were viewed more favourably when diaspora actors took a gap filling and supportive role of domestic actors and less favourably when seen to be in competition over resources and putting their own interests first. Trust between diaspora and domestic actors was relative, generally greater than between domestic and international actors, but still not without some tensions.

Critiques concerning the coloniality of the aid system and the limits of aid were also cited. Aid was considered to be creating dependency and humanitarianism too narrowly and limitingly focused. The failure of the system to meaningfully transition to greater local ownership was called out, as was the continued limited access to institutional funding and coordination mechanisms experienced by both domestic and diaspora actors. Participants questioned the appropriateness of donor interests, particularly noting donor country strategic and military objectives, to be at the helm of decision making. Whilst there appeared to be varying takes on it, there was a general sense that owing to both exclusion and the limitations of the aid system, the work of diaspora actors (and domestic actors) tended to sit somewhere outside of it.

Beyond humanitarian aid

What diaspora and domestic actors do want to work on together was more straightforward. Noting that the development oriented FGD for Pakistan also discussed dual diaspora roles in humanitarian response, and the more humanitarian oriented FGDs for Somalia and Syria refused such pigeonholing, the findings are relative to all and sit across the constructed humanitarian and development divide.

Participants saw their primary work as needing to be about transformative change, stating their desires to work together on changing and challenging the underlying conditions that lead to need, including global systems of inequality. They wanted to work together on creating a strategic vision and approach to addressing needs and this would need to be preparatory and forward thinking, comprehensive, multisectoral and intergenerationally inclusive. These objectives applied to both operational collaboration and collective, coordinated and strategic collaboration.

Owing to the perceived limitations of aid, it was suggested that the way of working together would propose an alternative to traditional aid partnership models. Partnerships between diaspora and domestic actors whether operational and individual or strategic and collective were desired to be locally led. Partnerships should be about supporting the important role of civil society as the primary agents of change, by supporting work that has a long term impact over the prioritisation of humanitarian relief only and by supporting Global South / domestic born solutions and alternatives. Some voices cautioned against replicating existing INGO models and partnership dynamics, instead, for diaspora and domestic actors to rethink, revisit and reclaim what they want to work on and the way they want to work together. It was also proposed that partnerships between diaspora and domestic actors should value and make space for reciprocity.

The role of diaspora actors were seen more favourably when they took on advocacy and direct funding roles. In addition, when they filled needed gaps in knowledge and skills and when they stayed the course and supported activities designed to have a longer impact, beyond only humanitarian relief.

Collaboration that was collective, coordinated and strategic was suggested to be for the same outlined objectives that centre the strategic vision of the respective country and the path towards it, as well as for the purpose of leveraging collectivity to influence change at policy and institutional levels. Coordinating knowledge sharing about each other, in order to support the identification and development of partnerships was also deemed important and doing so would alleviate some of the critiques raised during the series where both sides pointed out each others lack of ´standardisation.´[21]

What was consistent then, was the perception that the desired role of the diaspora is about how they can support domestic/civil society actors to bring about change, building operational and strategic partnerships and coalitions that are not limited by the confines of humanitarianism.

Summary. Direct diaspora and domestic collaboration is desired not to be limited by the boundaries of humanitarian aid, but rather, visionary, strategic and long term in objective, addressing root causes, the symptoms and future challenges.

[21] That standardisation is lacking of both local and diaspora actors was raised during the opening session. Participants / speakers shared that is hard to know with whom to work.

Answering the research question

The first part of our research question asked "what is the actual or potential role of the diaspora in working together with local actors to meet needs in countries of heritage " and has been largely answered above. The second part continued "and how might they contribute to challenging (re-shaping and/or re-inventing) inequitable structures and systems as they do so?."

Whilst challenging inequitable structures per se was not found to be the central focus for diaspora and local/domestic actors in their discussions concerning what they wanted to work on, the *way* they wanted to work together, noting proposals for locally owned and led operational and strategic partnerships, would in fact do just this. As would *what* they want to work on, as the prioritisation of different and expanded concerns, offer by default an alternative vision for engagement and challenge the monopoly of international actors in defining the same.

The findings that participants did not desire their role and scope of work together to be limited to humanitarian or development aid delivery and the appreciation for local/civil society leadership on the same helps illustrate the importance of the identified tensions with the aid sector. The sectors legitimation and support for work that fits the scope of what aid is deemed to be, maybe fundamentally at odds with its pursuit towards ´localisation´ - particularly where local/civil society are calling for the kind of collaboration that seeks to address underlying root causes and is focused on transformative change. Can diaspora actors fully heed such local calls, as this consultation indicates they may want to do, if situated within a system that limits and restricts what they can and cannot work on?

This further sheds light on diaspora positionality as often operating outside of the system and the suggestions, for example from the Syrian context, that local/diaspora collaboration should be independent, or from the Somali context, that being in parallel was suggested to be preferable. Preferences on positionality also pose a challenge and alternative to inequitable systems.

Having said that, there were also suggestions that did seek to directly challenge inequitable structures, with calls for diaspora actors to directly support, primarily through funding, local/domestic actors and local solutions that are typically left out. There were calls for diasporas to have greater presence in coordination mechanisms and international forums so they could exert greater pressure on policy makers. And there were cautions, that diaspora actors seek not to replicate the INGO model, along with inequitable partnership dynamics, but instead look to creating and strengthening preferred alternatives. This suggestion was slightly contentious, as some diaspora actors expressed the need to ´mature´ in order to gain a seat at the table, which leaves us with the additional question that, if diaspora and domestic actors evidently desire to work together differently, what does this difference and / or maturation look like? And perhaps invites an exploration into what new, different, improved, experimental, reclaimed ways of working look like.

Summary. Inequity in the international aid system is challenged by the way in which diaspora and domestic actors wish to work together, notably locally led, with autonomy and exploring direct support for solutions that originate from the Global South.

Recommendations

Based on the above insights and conclusions, the findings show that at a minimum, the way, and ways, of working together should be defined by local/domestic and diaspora actors together, preferably still, this should be led by domestic and supported by diaspora. This requires implicit considerations for the space that is created to work together and the recommendation is that it is not created, led, appropriated by the international aid system.

The primary role of international actors is instead suggested to be supporting and resourcing this to happen-where requested. Further, to work towards creating a more enabling environment that supports conversations and collaborations beyond a traditionally narrow aid sector scope of what localization and collaboration is envisaged to be.

It may well be however, and only greater conversation and exploration could really determine this, that this more systematic way of working together, and the solutions that therefore emerge, might seek to live (like much of the operational engagement already does) outside of the system.

Annex 1: Note on terminology

Local / domestic: Used interchangeably in reference to actors that are from, located within and work for the country of discussion - in this case the recipient county of aid, or the country of heritage/origin. The use of local recognises its current popular usage and association with the equally popular term ´localisation.´ However, owing to the fact that the term is unevenly applied (local is assumed to become synonymous with the Global South) we have also sought to use domestic where possible to dilute the reliance on the term local.

Diaspora actors: Refers to actors (which may be individuals, networks or organisations with varying degrees of structure and formality) that work to provide humanitarian or development assistance to countries of heritage/origin. Where relevant we distinguish between country specific diaspora actors, i.e. those who work specifically for their country of heritage/origin, and diaspora-led actors which during this consultation, have been organisations that work in more than one country. The latter, during the consultation, have also voiced preference for the term ´diverse community led´ rather than ´diaspora led´ organisations.

Country of heritage/origin: May also be known as homeland, which assumes the location of ´home´, or country of origin, which potentially excludes 1.5 (diaspora who migrated as a child or young adolescent), second and subsequent generation diaspora. Heritage perhaps better captures the connection without necessarily overstating it.

Country of residence or citizenship: Refers to the country that diaspora individuals and actors reside in and / or are citizens of. May also be known as the country of destination.

Global South and Global North: In this report, Global North refers to the UK, US, Europe and within which the power centres for the international aid system are located, and Global South to the majority world, within which countries that are in receipt of overseas aid, and the case study countries relevant to this consultation, are located. This study recognises that both these terms are significantly problematic.

The international aid system: refers to the UN led aid system whose power is predominantly monopolised by the Global North. It is generally applied in this report when speaking about both humanitarian aid and development aid.

Annex 2.1: Syria Focus Group Discussion Summary

The Syrian FGD on 19 September 2023 was primarily attended by Syrian individuals representing organisations registered in Turkey. As discussed by participants and qualified by the Facilitator Fadi Al-Dairi, the delineation of ´diaspora´ and ´local´ is not straightforward for Syrian organisations in the region, many of whom register in Turkey as no such registration is possible in Syria, yet operate inside Syria and therefore identify themselves as local Syrian humanitarian responders. It was also attended by Syrian diaspora organisations from the UK, US, Kurdistan, UAE and Lebanon, and facilitated by Fadi Al-Dairi of HIHFAD.

Participants discussed the nuances amongst the Syrian diaspora and the impact on and evolution of humanitarian response and engagement over the 12 years since the beginning of the civil war. Noting that whereas in the beginning the Syrian diaspora responded informally and in a voluntary manner today they are more organised. The continuity and evolution of their support over the last 12 meant that in the wake of the earthquake in 2022 diaspora actors were able to assume a clear role: *"The earthquake reflected how the work of the diaspora is important - for the last 12 years they have followed what´s been happening and they have communication channels with them and they could respond, re. fundraising, advocacy - they had a clear role"* (Syria FGD participant).

Participants discussed the role of the Syrian diaspora as bridge builders between the Syrians inside and outside of Syria, as advocates and spokespersons for Syrians when they are unable to assume that role for themselves. Participants also voiced appreciation for the value of smaller organisations in their flexibility and proximity to Syrian communities.

The central discussion of the Syrian FGD was around the need for a comprehensive and strategic vision and plan to respond to the needs of Syrians. Participants discussed the nature of humanitarian response as an emotional response, and one that needed to give way to a multisectoral effort (not humanitarian in nature alone) leading to a longer term response and impact, with one participant voicing frustration that *"Always we are restricted to these platforms of the UN - that always like to give humanitarian touch for everything".* And another adding: *"The focus should be on employment not dependency on food baskets."*

One role of diasporas was identified as "to establish a common space for Syrians" to enable such strategic efforts. Participants added that this would be easier to do in countries such as the UK, referencing political interference experienced by regional Syrian actors: *"It is difficult to create a common space because most of the regional countries working in this field, they always want to interfere and scatter the Syrian common space"* (Syria FGD participant). It was also acknowledged that divisions are echoed throughout diaspora communities and the perception shared that the focus on and funding for humanitarian response may well be due to the fact that it is easier to agree on.

An emphasis was placed squarely on Syrian civil society as the primary agent of change needed to rebuild Syrian society, and therefore the role of diasporas as supporting them: *"They are not someone to implement our ideas, they are the basic part of rebuilding the state. so let's think when we implement projects, not to ask for data collectors but on rebuilding civil society structures. they are the real change factor - we need to rebuild the structure of civil work. Need to think how to build from the bottom up, these systems to be active, well governed, built on real partnerships"* (Syria FGD participant). It was also acknowledged that the Syrian diaspora can contribute to creating a social contract between civil society and citizens, noting that "deep partnership" was required owing to magnitude of Syrians who are outside of the country.

Establishing trust and political divisions were cited as challenges to working together. Further, that despite numerous networks and coalitions, the need for greater investment in them. Participants discussed the importance of understanding and committing to the effort required of coalitions, including a focus on strategic visioning and requisite funding. It appeared that some participants felt that something different to what existed was needed, particularly whilst referencing the perceived successes of Syrian coalitions and diaspora engagement in other sectors and the need for multi-sectoral collaboration. Others still were hesitant to create

something new, rather work with and improve the platforms and forums that exist. It was acknowledged that the change and evolution of existing forums and civil society organisations was indicative of a positive process and a suggestion of evaluating the work of existing forums was raised.

Critiquing impact of donor biases in the way Syrian organisations are able to respond and design programmes, one participant added *"Donors also have preferences and don´t support projects in certain locations. There is fear - people are cautions of doing anything in some of these areas. These political differences get in the way of creating a strategic plan, which is needed for the whole of Syria."* Another participant expanded this by explaining restrictions in terms of how and where humanitarian actors are able to work are ultimately unsustainable: *"Maybe in the future those organisations will find themselves alone and the UN negotiation role might be withdrawn. All the reassurances are there. We have seen what they have done in NE, they have left suddenly, they closed the door. So this is something we need to talk about. Defacto forces were not created by us and we cannot work in those areas without coordinating with them / when the UN is not going to continue in place forever."* (Syria FGD participant)

Another participant continued: "*We need to make partnerships with NGOs in the regime held areas. I know it is difficult to implement and risky for regime held area NGOs and when it comes to policies and funding. But we are wasting our time if we don´t think like this, because we need to build societal ties. There are real civil society organisations, doing the work without serious international support. Heard encouraging experiences regarding civil society organisations in regime held areas. Shedding light on their experiences is important"* (Syrian FGD participant).

Citing these restrictive challenges, when returning to the conversation of building coalitions, it was suggested to: "*discuss how to build local coordination mechanisms, to be independent from the international UN mechanisms. Because during the earthquake we were paralysed. We are not capable to work with local governments,"* (Syria FGD participant)

Annex 2.2: Pakistan Focus Group Discussion Summary

Six participants attended the Pakistan Focus Group discussion on 26 October 2023, that was Facilitated by Themrise Khan, Independent analyst and researcher. Half of the participants represented domestic actors, and half were from the Pakistani diaspora.

Participants discussed the role of the Pakistani diaspora as primarily more involved in development oriented engagement, which then shifts towards humanitarian support during required periods – such as the unprecedented flooding of 2022. Further, it was highlighted that diaspora actors work well with the Pakistani government and have been particularly effective in supporting the education and health sectors. The reason for these successes was suggested to be because of evident need in both, that they are ´risk free sectors and that diasporas are involved in these sectors in their countries of residence and are therefore known and comfortable areas.

One participant offered that it was problematic that the majority of diaspora actors were concentrated around Islamabad, with domestic links much weaker outside of the main cities. The coordination of diaspora efforts with domestic NGOs was also a key theme of the discussion, with one participant recounting wasted resources and donations as a result of poor coordination during the 2005 earthquake. And another participant suggested a lack of trust may explain the tendency towards working in isolation. Later, another participant also commented that diaspora actors *"need to be bridged with local actors, so they can respond in a much much more efficient way"* (Pakistan FGD participant)

On the contrary, International actors were perceived to be better coordinated – and this started a short discussion on the difference between domestic and international actors. Whereas the former has better access to communities, are more agile, resilient and get to the local issues faster, working with the international aid system implies bureaucracy and an understanding of the need of the same which isn´t always there. Participants also compared differences between domestic partnerships with INGOs versus diaspora actors, noting cultural differences and diaspora actors dedication to Pakistan (as opposed to working in multiple locations).

The motivation of diaspora actors was also discussed, including that nostalgia played a part in *"partly emotional"* decisions on what to support. This tied into comments on longevity, with the perception that diaspora actors tend to stay for longer durations *"till they see some kind of results"* than their international counterparts. On the other hand, another participant shared that diaspora organisations are sometimes too emergency focused and also influenced by shifting priorities, elaborating:

"There´s a lot of fundraising and action that is happening at that time. And there´s only a few organisations who will stay for the longevity" (Pakistan FGD participant).

There appeared therefore to be no consensus amongst the group as to whether or not diaspora organisations generally take a short term or long term approach, owing to the likelihood that it differs.

In terms of where the diaspora is situated relative to the aid system, one participant offered that some are connected to the system and some are working in parallel.

Domestic government procedures and bureaucracy was cited as a challenge for actors in the aid and development sectors. This included a note on government expulsions of INGOs and a caution that *"if we depend too much on international INGOs, we become a bit vulnerable"* (Pakistan FGD participant). Whether or not that meant diaspora organisations could be seen as a replacement therefore was responded to with a caution that it would depend on the politics of the diaspora organisation. Those that perhaps did not have a warm sentiment towards the government would likely pay the price.

Participants also briefly discussed the role of diaspora actors, considering whether or not they are better placed to implement or to advocate for the work of domestic actors. One participant responded that diaspora

actors can fill needed gaps (for example in training, or financial resources) in support of the good work that domestic actors are doing. The same participant commented that countries change and diaspora´s who are not always up to speed on the same *"at times tried to apply the same solution which they were doing before leaving the country."* or that *"they are familiar with what is happening in North America (for example) and they try and bring those solutions here"* Concluding that it is better for diasporas not to be implementers. The conversation around whether or not diasporas have a good understanding of the country was however nuanced, in some cases considered to be the case especially within organisations that have a mix of diaspora and national board members.

There were a couple of next steps suggested with regards to the continuation of this conversation. One was for case studies and research on successful diaspora / domestic engagement models, in order to build a theoretical framework around the discussion. Another suggested *"bringing together the actors who really want to see Pakistan change and really bringing them around the table to see how best we can work together."*

It was emphasised that this dialogue between domestic and diaspora actors, one that seeks to understand the challenges of one another *"has to be led from Pakistan, and meeting with key local actors and saying ´how best can we collaborate?"* (Pakistan FGD participant). Participants did not think anything of the kind currently existed.

Annex 2.3: Somalia Focus Group Discussion Summary

20 participants took part in the FGD for Somalia on 3 October 2023, with roughly even domestic/diaspora representation. The participants from the Somali diaspora were from the UK, USA, Kenya and Canada.

Participants spoke about the value of diaspora organisations in comparison to international and UN agencies when responding to crises in Somalia, noting that *"diaspora organisations seem to be pro-active and more responsive"* both in terms of fundraising and response, owing to them being less hampered by bureaucracy. Diaspora and domestic actors were considered to enjoy greater trust than their international counterparts and hold power in terms of advocacy towards governments in countries of residence when talking about advocating towards change in the sector, particularly as the Somali diaspora form a large constituency in many countries. Another participant added that diaspora actors have contributed significantly to the provision of health, water and education services.

Diaspora access to donors and their ability to *"better engage with donors and international actors",* was also appreciated, noting poor access to funding experienced by domestic organisations and how the two could collaborate further on capital transfer. Understanding need, one participant asserted, was dependent on proximity and a distinction was made between diaspora and domestic actors who have greater proximity, with international actors who have less. International actors therefore see needs in a more limited way: *"they will see, it´s just the humanitarian needs."* Adding, *"I think for thirty years to have the same type of need is a bit in the sense, silly and obsolete. And being on the ground you realise there are other bigger needs that the country needs in terms of infrastructure development"* (Somalia FGD participant). Another participant further noted, *"There is that narrative of humanitarian aid for how long? I think that is also a very serious reflection and discussion."* (Somalia FGD participant). Further, pointing to service, economic and livelihood related needs as well as underlying causes such as climate change, added, *"It´s not only about cash transfers and food distribution and providing enough food items, and that´s it. No, they need actually much more than that."*

One participant, from the diaspora felt that domestic actors welcomed the efforts of diaspora organisations, but cautioned that *"Where it becomes a bit challenging is when the diaspora organisations are conceived to be competing for resources."* They emphasised that without this competitive element, rather when many resources are being mobilised, diaspora are strongly welcomed. Another participant supported this concern noting that meagre funding available to domestic organisations meant competition amongst them was already high, and where both domestic and diaspora actors are concerned *"the focus continues to be in competing for resources"* which *"creates more dis-harmony than being able to kind of work together to change the system."* Another participant felt that younger Somalis are generally more welcoming and trusting of diaspora engagement, whereas the elders are a little more hesitant to accept support.

In terms of diaspora and domestic mobilisation of resources it was asserted that *"diaspora are part of a parallel aid system for sure."* (Somalia FGD participant). This positionality, of being parallel, was considered by the commenting participant, to be a good thing, citing *"global inequitable systems"* and elaborating *"I think the current aid system that is built around international development, where what country X gives to country Y has its flaws and its challenges and having an alternative where we have the diaspora for a parallel way of giving within a parallel system is very encouraging and at times probably offers a lot of life saving support"* (Somalia FGD participant)

Exploring this parallel aid system, its structure and asking how it can be better utilised was suggested, and a concern about its sustainability was also questioned: *"Are we going to continue to see the same level of Somali diaspora giving to Somalia as we do right now?"* This was picked up by another participant who also asked *"How long will this train of diasporas helping Somalia continue? And how can you keep that? Or preserve it?"* (Somalia FGD participant). The importance of engaging younger generations to connect and volunteer was therefore emphasised. Another participant shared the view on the positionality of existing cooperation:

"working in parallel for sure" adding *"I think the local won´t be able to achieve what they need without the support of the diaspora"* (Somalia FGD participant).

On the positionality of the diaspora, one participant reminded the group that the diaspora are in fact everywhere, they are represented in the UN, the INGOs and greatly in government, which also creates domestic/diaspora competition over roles and a tendency of diaspora to dominate.22 The question therefore of whether or not they are parallel was suggested to be less important than whether or not they work in equal partnership. *"Finding the right model of collaboration, I think is something that still needs to be defined in my opinion."* (Somalia FGD participant).

A cited challenge included the tendency of diaspora actors to invest in the communities that they belong to, and that can mean that certain areas that lack diaspora representation, can get left behind. This seemed to be more the case for development oriented projects, and less of the case when emergency relief is being provided. Another participant added there is sometimes a *"culture clash"* between diaspora and locals and added that local organisations had the advantage in terms of access, ability to deliver, and the trust they experience locally. This participant suggested the role of the diaspora should be more about providing support and capacity building to domestic actors where needed. One participant made a distinction between older generation diasporas and the younger generation, the former they felt were not really bringing ´developed world´ good practices into effect in Somalia, rather *"they melted back into the traditions and the pastoral way of thinking."* The same participant suggested that the younger generation has a different outlook, perhaps offering something different.

Challenges in the operating environment was also raised, noting government bureaucracy and the need for local knowledge in how it is navigated.

It was further suggested that Somalia lacks *"the culture of diaspora organisations and local organisations partnering"* Rather, local organisations tend to partner with international organisations who are better able to attract funding which *"makes them an attractive partner to local Somali Organisations."* The same participant suggested that to develop mutual appreciation of what each other brings, that the benefits of diaspora and local/domestic partnerships should be better promoted and relationships built, musing:

> *"Imagine if the Somali diaspora actors or organisations were able to access resources in the same way? I think that would also kind of reset the benefit in terms of partnering between local and diaspora organisations"* (Somalia FGD participant).

Other participants continued the conversation on partnership dynamics between diaspora and domestic actors, cautioning that how they engage is important, pointing out that sometimes diaspora organisations view their local counterparts as less mature, or *"not as elite,"* despite the capacity, potential and influence of domestic actors when it comes to implementing. Another participant asserted that diaspora/domestic linkages and connections can be observed at a community level which indicated a difference between individual/ community level connections and formalised partnerships. They also pointed out the role of diasporas in helping to establish domestic organisations. Another participant advised that the development of partnerships should be a *"locally led process,"* calling for diaspora actors to channel funds raised through trusted local organisations which have *"less operational costs compared to international actors who are present in the country"* with another participant acknowledging the locals *"extensive competence and experience"* and the leaning opportunity they provide to diasporas. The readiness of local partnerships and cooperation was cited by one participant as integral to being able to successfully deliver in Somalia and another asserting that *"partnership must be central to everything."*

22 This conversation was continued after the FGD with the facilitator who reiterated issues of competition between diaspora and locals and the preference given to dual passport holders for positions within international organisations.

Spaces and events that fostered collaboration, networking and mutual knowledge exchange was put forward, particularly where individuals can get to know each other in-person and preferably held in Somalia. Another supported this idea and added their own organisations efforts to connect second generation diaspora with local civil society through meetings and forums. Again readiness of spaces that foster collaboration was emphasised in order to be able to respond quickly in times of crisis, noting wasted resources as a result.

WHAF consultation insights report