



BRAINGAIN

SOMALIA

Mohamed Ilmi

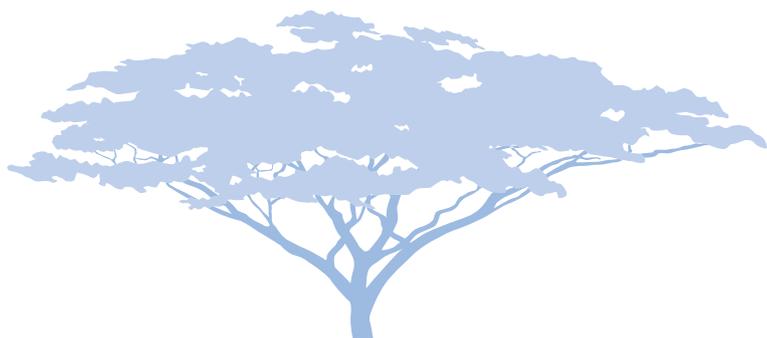
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Mr Ilmi came to the Netherlands in the latter part of 2000s and had already obtained extensive experience in humanitarian aid in Northern part of Somalia (Borama and Hargeisa) with several NGO's such as Care International and Save the Children. Even though having been in the Netherlands for a relatively short period, Somalia was always on his mind as he was trying to find a way to contribute to the rebuilding of the country.

Through Brain Gain Program, Mr. Ilmi has obtained a placement in a period of 6 months at the Ministry of Education and Higher Studies of Somaliland. His duties include providing technical support and advice to teacher education and training unit, including NTTI (National Teachers Training Institute). He provides support in coordinating, facilitating, monitoring, supervision and evaluation of training programs. Also, he assists in implementing education projects with other actors to improve the quality and service delivery of basic education to eradicate poverty. And last but not least, he also provides technical support in developing Somaliland National Education Policy, Education sector Analysis and Education Sector Strategic Plan of the ministry of Education and Higher Studies.



What was the reason for you to go and work in Somalia? What was the trigger for you?

Ever since I arrived in the Netherlands, I have been thinking to go back to Somalia and participate in the process of rebuilding the country. I knew that if I would find an area to support, I would be very passionate in contributing about promoting, strengthening and building the capacity of institutional organization to support civil society. And also to build stronger and more effective civil society engagement in education sector process and through this to ensure improved progress towards education goals to eradicate poverty.

My aim has been to provide technical support to the ministry of education in order to produce qualified teachers under teacher training activities (by training and equipping them with knowledge, attitudes, behavior and skills).

The chaos in Somalia has been going on over the past 26 years, all institutions were either destroyed or looted. This has caused that many children (almost 500,000 school children) to be out of



the school in Somaliland alone. The quality of education is still poor and there are over 6000 primary and secondary untrained school teachers. Also, young men and women have risked their lives by going through dangerous journeys for seeking better life in Europe.

Initially, I was thinking, at least if I can contribute my technical expertise at MoE&HS to produce highly qualified teachers, that may help and support to the school age population (around 500,000 school children who are out of school in Somaliland) increase the quality of education. It's also worth to mention that it will decrease the large number of Somali immigrant who are dying in the desert and Mediterranean sea with dehydration, hunger and physical abuse by guards and smugglers. However I also realized that this will take long time to make such positive change and that immigrants will continue to that risk journey and die in that place for a long time.

What has your experience been so far both professionally and on a personal level?

I have been involved in the Education sector of Somaliland since 2004. When I graduated from Amoud University at the time I started working with Save the Children Denmark as a Project assistant in Awdal region, coordinating and facilitating teacher training program with the ministry of education and Amoud University. Since then my experience in education has been increasing with growing responsibility. Ever since I arrived at the ministry of education in Hargeisa, it has been very productive and efficient experience to make impact and contribute my input, and above all, I can say with no hesitation at all that, it has been an amazing experience that helped me grow not only professionally but also personally. I learn how to deal with difficult people in attitude and power, overcome challenges and adopt new situations.

What are your thoughts about reducing the Brain Drain of Somalia in relation to establishing a good educational system? And how does the Ministry of Education fit into all this?

Education is fundamental to overall development and growth for every nation, its recognized as necessary tool that provides the human resources needed in the effort toward national development and to make possible development achievements, in agriculture, livestock, health, water and sanitation, good governance and efficient public administration and private sector growth. I believe that education is social inclusion that helps everybody become reflective, critical and self-determined persons.

In Somaliland, though improving a little bit but still the educational system and the quality of education is very poor, student enrolments increased from 160,000 in 2010 to almost 232,546 in 2015 in primary schools, while the number of secondary school students have increased from 25,705 to 43,501 in 2014 as well. There are over 33,000 students in around 36 private universities. However the quality of education in the tertiary institutions remained poor except few of them. The ministry of education and higher studies has many challenges ahead, mainly



lack of resources to implement any educational goals, policies and strategies.

In my observation, around 6000 out of 9000 primary school teachers are untrained in Somaliland, therefore strengthening the quality and capacity of primary education and secondary could result good educational system. Establishing National Teachers Training Institute for primary and secondary teachers training, providing regular teachers training program, developing responding curriculum, clear policy and guideline for teacher education are very important to improve the quality of education.

On the other hand, in order to establish good educational system in Somalia, we must first develop modern strategies of teaching learning and evaluation, consider special needs educations to meet the UN standard on equalization of opportunities for persons with disability, coordinate of professional development of teachers, increase the budget of the ministry of education for educational activities, unify all training programs supported by UN and International Organizations, establish and implement quality assurance and standard system, increasing the salary of teachers (poor remuneration), establishing libraries for teacher education, (resource and research centre), increasing female teachers in the teaching force, developing monitoring and supervision framework, developing job descriptions, roles and responsibility of the ministry of education and higher studies, promoting transfer of authority and responsibility (decentralization), and strengthening the capacity of planning and statistics department of the ministry of education (right person with the right position).

In addition to this, Setting up TVET (Technical Vocational Educational and Training) and Technical Secondary schools for life skills and entrepreneur skills across the regions of Somalia, creating Poly Technic schools, minimizing the number of private Universities and strengthening the quality of education in the Universities. Developing effective public financial management, costing and financial effectiveness will improve the quality of education in Somalia. In my understanding, the brain drain of Somalis can only be reduced by the realization of the above proffer with creation of jobs.

To make it very short, the ministry of education and higher studies does not have the capacity to do and achieve with all these challenges mentioned above. To do so it needs plan, time and the resources to execute, in my estimation, the ministry of education and higher studies of Somaliland needs at least a budget of \$ 400 million US Dollars per year, and the current budget of the whole Somaliland government is around \$ 228 million US Dollars, mainly from \$ 150 million of revenue collected and foreign aid including SDF (Somaliland Development Fund), in which educational budget is 8% which is equivalent to \$ 12 million US Dollars. From this perspective, the roads ahead are very far and very rough, but we must obey the forces that we want to common.



Would you consider staying in Somalia despite the lack of safety in some regions?

I am considering to stay in Somalia and support civil society participation and engagement in education sector process and in formulation, implementation and monitoring of strategies for educational development. Interestingly, I see many foreign experts operating in Somalia at the moment, although many of them contributed very positively, there are others, whose insights and contributions, sough important but lacks cultural and linguistic understanding, and does not apprehend specifically the context that if doing so could lead the country out of the hazardous. The need for local and Somali diaspora must be acknowledged. Hence, I cannot detach myself from these pressing issues and need to contribute at least something for the positive.

What kind of advice would you give to fellow Dutch – Somali’s who are interested in taking part of rebuilding Somalia?

I would like to advise them to look for an interesting area which fits matches with their area of qualification. I understand that they have good experience, and that they have been heavily involved in encouraging healthcare and education in Somalia, and regularly providing life-saving support to their families in Somalia through remittance. There are many challenges as well, among them are understanding the Somali culture and language to work and understand more effectively in this complex situation. It’s also worth to note that there are concerns about Somali diaspora taking jobs away that could have been done by some of the local Somalis. I have got similar problem, but my ability to understand the environment helped me to go through.

