



BRAINGAIN

SOMALIA

Muna Handulle

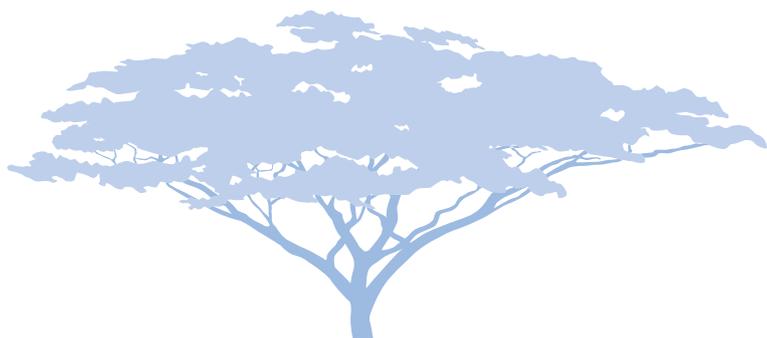
Consultant (lecturer & researcher) at
Benadir University (Mogadishu, Somalia)

FSAN

W. de Zwijgerlaan 350 B/3
1055 RD Amsterdam

+31(0)20 - 486 16 28
info@fsan.nl

www.fsan.nl



FSAN | Federatie Somalische
Associaties Nederland

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Ms Handulle grew up in the region of Amsterdam and has a background in bio molecular science and public health. Having had the ability to work and travel abroad during her studies in the Netherlands, she has always had the urge to go back to Somalia one day and to contribute to the rebuilding of the country.

Through the Brain Gain program she has obtained a placement of 4 months at the Benadir University in Mogadishu. Her duties (amongst others) consist of providing lectures (e.g. communicable disease and control) for the Health Sciences faculty. She works closely with her fellow staff members for grant writing and fundraising.



Also, Ms Handulle is in the process of revising the existing curriculum for all of the 4 divisions of the Health Sciences of the university. Currently, the university has faced a withdrawal of staff due to lack of funds which makes her presence even more vital for the organization.

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

I had the opportunity to come back to the country for work last year, the first time since we left, fleeing from the war in 1992. Although I always wanted to come back one day and actually mean something to those who could use my help or input, I then realized that "ONE DAY" is actually NOW. So, upon my arrival back to the Netherlands 6 months later, I searched for opportunities to get back to Somalia. Then I found out about Brain Gain and now I am in Mogadishu.

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

For every experience there is the good and the bad, on both professional and personal level. One thing I have learned is that these two, personal and professional lives, are intertwined, much more than in the west.



As a Diaspora, you have to be very transparent about your motives to be back in the country and most certainly about what you do. Also, don't pretend to know-it-all because you came from the West. This is crucial to be accepted as "one of them" and eliminate the possibility of "them and us". You have to be willing to respectfully engage in dialogues and be patient and understanding about possible mistrust, especially if you came to bring change.

This helped me to feel at home, "integrate", although I am one of them, a Somali, and do my job as part of the Brain Gain team.

Currently the university is experiencing its own Brain Drain. Could you elaborate more on this matter and explain to us the importance of the concept of Brain Gain?

As the majority of the knowledge institutes in Somalia are private, their income is dependent on the number of students enrolled and possible funds from international institutions (Aid). To cover all the needs of the institution, to uphold and improve the quality, there is a major deficiency. These deficiencies are to sum up financial, material, space and human resources. To my understanding this has a negative influence in the quality of the knowledge produced and subsequently the development of the nation.

Programs such as Brain Gain could mean a boost to upgrade the overall quality of an institution (capacity building of the staff on every level) if implemented correctly. Brain Gain is also covering the distance in demand and offer between the Diaspora and their country of origin without the candidate having to exhaust his or her own resources (financial) while offering his or her expertise.

However, actually improving the quality of any institution or establishment in any field needs more time and coherency than the period Brain Gain Somalia is offering at the moment.

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

YES. In fact I am still in Mogadishu despite the fact that my Brain Gain contract has come to an end. I got a job offer as a Health programs coordinator for an NGO and I accepted it.



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

Come and see first and I am not talking about the "Liido beach experience" alone. Be optimistic and most importantly realistic. Keep in mind this is a country that hasn't known firm rules and regulations for the past 25 years. You will see that despite all the problems the country is flourishing and the people are ever hopeful and grateful.

