

# aiding refugees during south-south migration: examining syrian diaspora assistance to syrian forced migrants



Syrian refugees remove snow from their shelters at an informal tented settlement in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon during a blizzard earlier today. © UNHCR/A.McConnell

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# TODAY'S PRESENTATION

Examine the advantages Syrian diaspora nonprofit organizations have in providing aid to Syrians who migrate to other destinations in the global South.

- strong motivation based on deep personal ties
- cultural competence and familiarity
- informal accountability mechanisms that derive from their social network ties

# DIASPORA REMITTANCES AND DIASPORA PHILANTHROPY

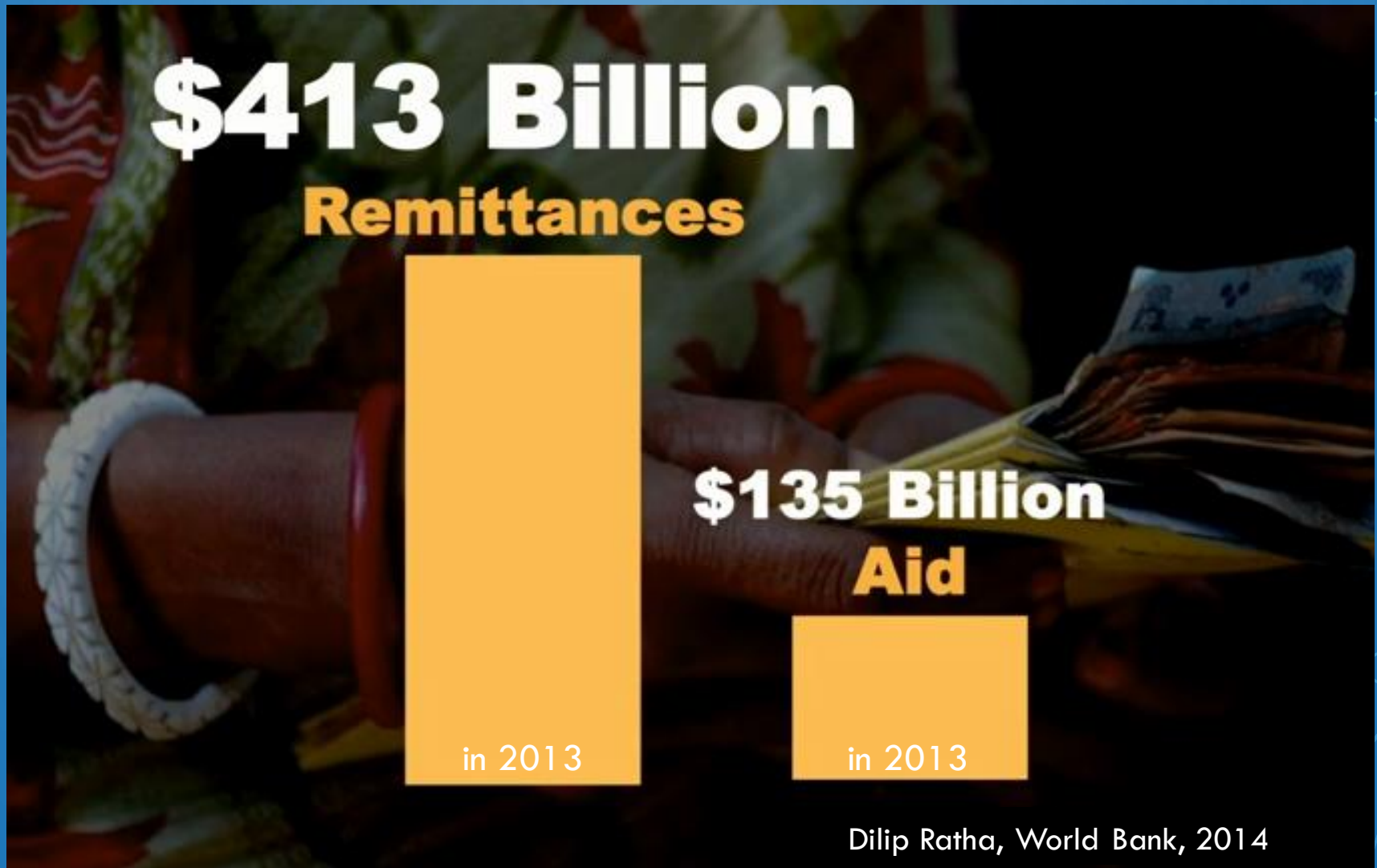
A world map with a dark blue background. White lines with dots at the ends represent migration routes, connecting various countries across all continents. The lines are most dense between North America and Europe, and between Europe and Africa/Asia. A large purple rectangle is centered over the map, containing the text '180 million' in orange. Below this, another purple rectangle contains the text 'migrants from poor countries worldwide send money to their home countries' in orange.

**180**  
**million**

**migrants from poor countries  
worldwide send money to  
their home countries**

Dilip Ratha, World Bank, 2014

# DIASPORA REMITTANCES AND DIASPORA PHILANTHROPY





# Remittances

**\$ billion**

**% of GDP**



**\$72 bn**  
India



**\$18 bn**  
Egypt



**42% of GDP**  
Tajikistan



**35% of GDP**  
Somalia

Dilip Ratha, World Bank, 2014

- Globally, remittances = \$200/ month per migrant on average
- The average annual income in Somalia is \$250/year

# DIASPORA REMITTANCES: PROMISE AND PROBLEMS

- Have large impacts on local economies
- Increase with instability/ conflict
- Directly reach poor
- Lower school drop-out rates
- Higher birth weights
- Impacts are unequal across individuals and communities
- Communities with most migrants are not necessarily those with most need (India)
- Investments are largely personal (not addressing broader social concerns)

## DIASPORA PHILANTHROPY DEFINED

Money, goods, volunteer labor, knowledge and skills, and other assets donated for the social benefit of **a community broader than ones' family members**, in a country or region where there is a population with whom the donor(s) have **ancestral ties**.

Research on this topic is “in its infancy” (Brinkerhoff 2014)

# MECHANISMS OF DIASPORA PHILANTHROPY

		Donor Aggregation	
		Individual donor	Multiple donors
Donation Size	Small	Some remittances, individual donations	Hometown associations, neighborhood and regional groups, ethnic and clan associations, <b>foreign-based ethnic NGOs</b> , online platforms, small foundations
	Large	Direct donations from highly successful businesspersons, celebrities, sports stars, and large foundations started by such individuals	Professional associations, family foundations, venture philanthropy funds
Adapted in part from Newland et al. 2010, p. 10			



# PRESUMED ADVANTAGES OF DIASPORA PHILANTHROPY

- Target underserved or difficult to reach locations and populations
- Advantages in identifying local partners
- Better understanding of local needs, and how to address them
- Greater credibility with local partners
- Cultural competency and direct experience = better decision making
- May be willing to address problems considered controversial by local population
- Persevere despite obstacles and setbacks
- Bring a new and typically unheard voice to the development agenda

## DRAWBACKS/CHALLENGES OF DIASPORA PHILANTHROPY

- Limited financial resources of new migrants
- Countries of origin may neglect development goals
- Countries of origin may resist migrant involvement
- Diasporans may misunderstand local needs
- Diasporans may engage in well meaning but unprofessional efforts (philanthropic amateurism)
- Social equity concerns
  - May not reach poorest or most vulnerable
  - May target only specific religions, ethnicities, or regions
- Diasporans may exacerbate conflict

# THE SYRIAN MIGRANT CRISIS

## OUTSIDE SYRIA

- 5.1 million refugees have fled Syria
- More than 4.8 million refugees displaced to countries in the global South (including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey)

## INSIDE SYRIA

- 6.3 million people internally displaced from their homes
- 13.5 million people inside Syria need humanitarian assistance



Women and children from Syria at a Turkish military checkpoint  
Bryan Denton, The New York Times, Aug 2015

# MIGRANTS TO (AND WITHIN) SOUTHERN STATES

Syrian refugees who are able to migrate to European Union member states are often comparatively better off than other refugees.



Mahmoud, age 15  
UNHCR, S. Baldwin, 2013

Those who remain in the global South are more likely to be:

- Less affluent
- Children
- Mothers of young children
- Elderly
- Ill
- Persons with disabilities

# SOUTHERN HOST STATES: SYRIAN FORCED MIGRANTS AND THE LEBANESE CONTEXT

1/23 the size of Ghana  
1/3 the size of Belgium

Population 4.6 million in 2012 (United Nations, 2015)

Over 1 million Syrian de facto refugees residing in Lebanon (almost 25% of current residents) (May 2015)

Syrian refugees live in 2,100 communities and an additional 1,400 informal refugee settlements

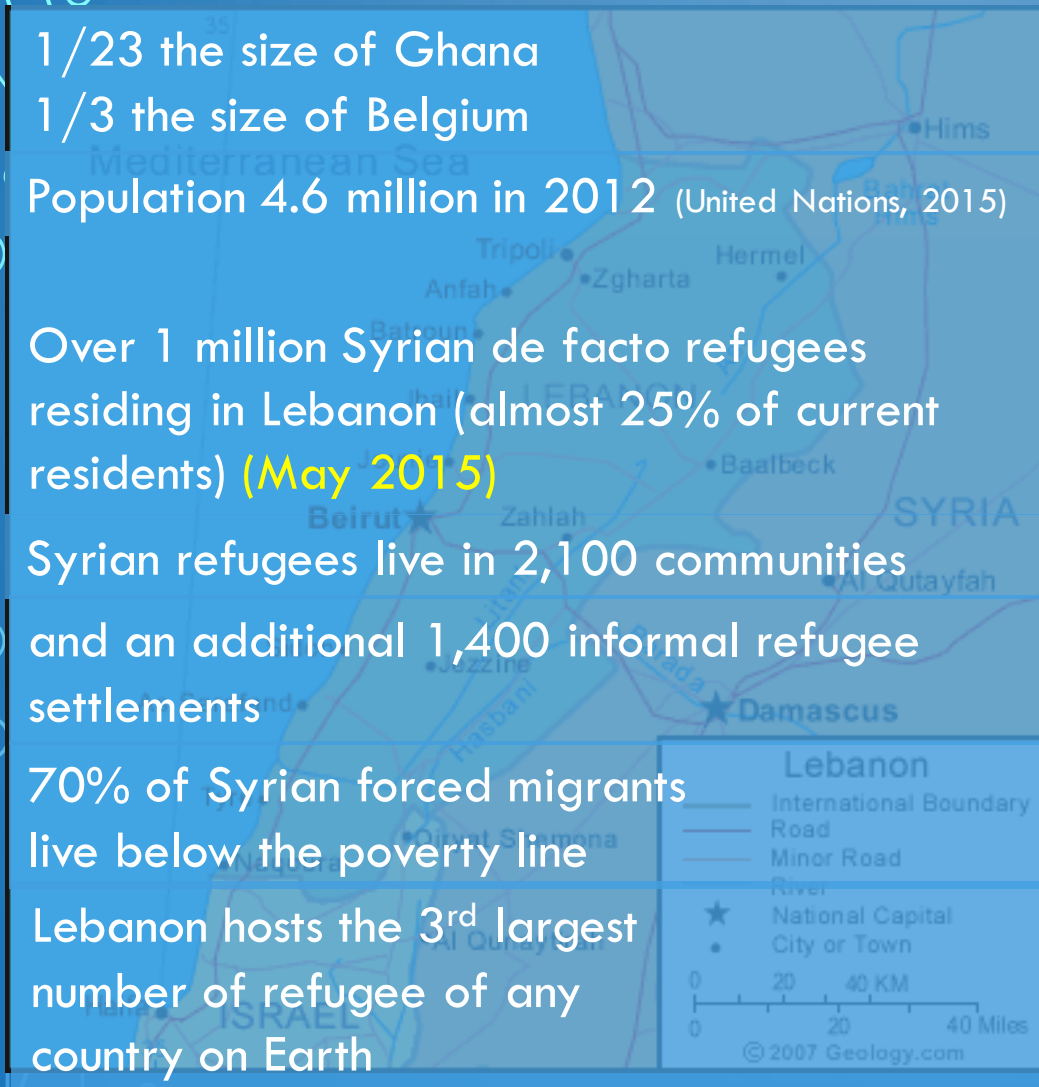
70% of Syrian forced migrants live below the poverty line

Lebanon hosts the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest number of refugee of any country on Earth

5.1 million + people have fled Syria (2017, UNHCR)

13.5 million displaced within Syria (2017, UNHCR)

Infrastructure in Lebanon was already weak prior to the Syrian conflict





# THE STUDY

Semi-structured interviews with:

26 individuals in leadership roles  
in four Syrian diaspora nonprofits

Purposive sample supplemented by snowball sampling

Data collection is ongoing

**Leaders** = ORGANIZATION FOUNDERS, BOARD MEMBERS, AND  
INDIVIDUALS WHO DIRECTED KEY PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

All are from Syria or of Syrian descent.



2- Canada

9-US

2- Germany

11- Lebanon

2- Dubai

Additional sites of work: Syria, Turkey

## 2- Dubai

## 11- Lebanon

# ADVANTAGES OF DIASPORA MOTIVATIONS FOR PHILANTHROPY

## Diasporan identity as a strong motivator of philanthropy

(Best et al. 2013, Brinkerhoff 2008, Brinkerhoff 2011, Nielsen & Riddle 2009, Tchouassi & Sikod 2010, Werbner 2002)

“So at that point (when I became involved in aiding Syrian forced migrants), things had started to get bad and so I felt **like I had so much that I owed to Syria**, in terms of my cultural upbringing and going back there every summer. It was kind of a home away from home for me, and obviously for me, where my parents were born and my family was. So I felt like given the magnitude of what was going on there, **it was really an obligation of mine to try and give back** in some way, shape or form, and (this diaspora organization) felt like a great way to do that.”

# ADVANTAGES OF DIASPORA MOTIVATIONS FOR PHILANTHROPY

Awareness that one's fellow Syrians are reliant on diaspora assistance generated a sense of obligation to continue aid during challenging times (Brinkerhoff 2004, 2008, 2014, Lubkemann 2008).

“A lot of NGOs, Syrian or Lebanese or Turkish local NGOs, they are funded by a big funder like the UN and if they stop the funding, the NGO stops the project. But we have so many Syrian donors abroad, if one donor leaves or suspends funds, we can look for other donors and continue the project. Our donors are willing to stick with us even when things get hard, or there is donor fatigue with this migrant crisis.”

# ADVANTAGES OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND FAMILIARITY

**Additional cultural competency and local knowledge that supports efforts to assist Syrian forced migrants** (Johnson 2007, Newland & Patrick 2004)

“Having a board of Syrian expatriates does make a difference, I think mostly for the positive. All of the members on the board now used to visit Syria at least every other year for the summer, so they still have relatives in Syria, **they know Syria, they are familiar with the culture**. It’s not like they left and never went back. And this is very important because **they can relate the work to their lives, they can relate to the Syrians there**, and they want to work to help their fellow Syrians move ahead. They are passionate about it.”

# ADVANTAGES OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND FAMILIARITY

However, cultural competency and local knowledge varies based on country of residence.

“Definitely because (the Syrian diaspora donors) ...never lived in Syria as citizens, but as expatriates, sometimes ...**they have expectations that are not realistic.** For example, they might expect that the refugees are going to learn English in like four months, which is impossible, or expect them to know how to use the laptop. So they had to learn about the children.”

# ADVANTAGES OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND FAMILIARITY

“We had a donor who wanted to give us fifty tablets for a more interactive classroom, but we said, “Hang on, let’s see if we can find Arabic apps first,” because most apps are very hard for us to use with our students, for example with reading or science, because the students can’t read English. So we had to let (the donor) know they should let us do this research first before they go buy tablets. Plus in our tent school, there is sometimes electricity but there is no internet, so (the Syrian diaspora donor) forgot that our schools and our students are different.”



# ADVANTAGES OF INFORMAL NETWORKS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Enhanced ability to identify trustworthy partners and circumvent challenges in the operating environment, by making use of social network ties in the diaspora. (Brinkerhoff 2011, Newland & Patrick 2004).

“The organizations I work with, I know the people personally that work within the organization, so you really do know what’s going on, what the motives are, is there an agenda, is there not. Versus (another Syrian diaspora organization), the reason why we were very skeptical was because, well, we didn’t see any people that we know. It was just the idea that we’ve never seen this organization, what exactly is their agenda; you do feel skeptical when you’re not familiar.”

# ADVANTAGES OF INFORMAL NETWORKS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

“Because most of the founders were involved in what’s going on in Syria so we have our networks, we have our contacts, we have our friends and our families who are part of what is going on. So this is how we start, and then **the good names are easy to figure out.**”

Diasporan advantage over traditional aid:

**Dense personal networks enable diasporans to identifying dependable partners and enforce agreements, even in places where the legal system is fragile** (Brinkerhoff 2011, Newland & Patrick 2004).

# ADVANTAGES OF INFORMAL NETWORKS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

## Circumventing disrupted financial systems

“So we try to send some money to some trusted affiliate NGOs in Turkey then to get the money from Turkey to Syria. This is for the North part. For the South part we manage it through Lebanon, we transfer the money to some friends or some trusted person in Lebanon, then we pay it in Lebanon so they can get it to the south. It used to be (that we had to carry cash across the border). Now we have some good networks where you can get the money whenever you want and you can pay it directly inside.”

# ADVANTAGES OF INFORMAL NETWORKS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

## Reputation as an accountability mechanism

“As an organization, humanitarian, your reputation is everything on the ground. Whether it’s ours or someone else’s, reputation is a big part of what we do. We make sure to maintain our reputation, but also pay attention to the reputation of our partner, because who we work with is extremely important to our reputation.”

Diaspora membership raises the stakes of loss of reputation. Partners fear losing reputation not just professionally, but within larger family and friendship networks in the Syrian diaspora.

# CONCLUSIONS

## Diaspora aid comes with limitations

- Social network ties = social network limitations

## Advantages include:

- Past experience in global South = effective strategies
  - More knowledge about local conditions and needs
- } esp. diaspora members w. experience in South
- Social network advantage = identify trustworthy partners, reputation as an accountability mechanism.
  - Strong emotional ties = perseverance in challenging/dangerous contexts.

# THANK YOU! QUESTIONS?



UNHCR, R. Haidar 2013

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