

# The Bellagio Initiative

The Future of Philanthropy and Development in  
the Pursuit of Human Wellbeing

## Global Dialogue Report

### Living on the Move: Kinna, Kenya

Patta Scott-Villiers and Eugenie Reidy

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For further information on the Bellagio Initiative:  
E-mail: [contact@thebellagioinitiative.org](mailto:contact@thebellagioinitiative.org)  
Web: [www.bellagioinitiative.org](http://www.bellagioinitiative.org)

# Living on the move: Kinna, Kenya

**Patta Scott-Villiers and Eugenie Reidy<sup>1</sup>**

‘They think mobility doesn’t make good citizens!’

## The philanthropy of mobility

Fowziya Sheekh Hussein kicks the mud from her town shoes. She is a young Somali-English woman in a black headscarf and large and shiny sunglasses. One of a small group of people sitting on rush mats under the trees by an African river, she is telling a story. ‘My journey began at the age of six when the war broke out in Somalia. I remember the soldiers coming in and destroying everything good that I could remember. The journey was horrific, it was overcrowded and the conditions were just terrible. After three years in Kenya I went with my cousin, who is like a mother to me, to the United Kingdom. It felt so foreign and I felt so out of place. I was away from the war-torn zone but my heart did long for my parents and siblings. I didn't know if I would ever see them again. The school I was in was very low in the league table and not many students went to university, let alone medical school. The teachers were discouraging. But my exodus from Somalia gave me the opportunity to become a better person in the society and an opportunity to contribute positively to humanity. I'm a medical doctor now. I aim to one day work with humanitarian organisations and charities using my expertise to contribute to countries that lack basic medical facilities’.

People who live a life on the move are aware that they are often seen as undesirable and dangerous. The 23 people gathered at the riverside to inform the Bellagio initiative dialogue on philanthropy and development want to put the record straight. In different ways, they each live life on the move, some driven by war and violence, others choosing economic migration, yet others are born into a mobile life. Their movement encompasses Somalia, Kenya, Sudan and Ethiopia, UK and beyond. As each one speaks it becomes increasingly clear that a successful life on the move is not a selfish thing. It generates a remarkable philanthropy.

Daoud Tari Abkula follows. ‘I was born sometime in the 1960s, in the bush by this river, to a very wealthy livestock herding family. I was an accountant but I left it and joined activism, activism on behalf of our people. My elder brother and I combined herds. Some of my brothers who are younger and able to move have gone to look for better pastures, two of them are living in America. Even those ones they send money back to buy animals at home, the way of life of my people’.

Ahmed Haji Abdi, a Somali community leader from the city of Bristol in UK takes up the story. ‘The first ten years of my life were in a refugee camp in Somalia. I went to secondary school in Mogadishu, then in the 1991 collapse we were forced back to the Somali region of Ethiopia. I wasn't satisfied, I wanted to move out. I moved as far as England and got refugee status, studied economics and international relations as an undergraduate and then project management at postgraduate level. After that I worked in social services for non-white children in the school system of Bristol.

I got an award for my community work both in the UK and for Somalis at home. I've been setting up community projects in the UK and also combining with others in Bristol to send large amounts

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of money home to Somalia and the Somali region in Ethiopia to support communities there. Reflecting back on whether my life would have been better if I'd stayed, I believe I wouldn't have had the education opportunities. Because I moved, my future and opportunities are better, and I can invest more back into my community. Our remittances address poverty'.

Dr Mohamud Said, a gentleman delighted with this unusual meeting under the trees, demonstrates another kind of energetic philanthropy. 'I was born in Moyale in Kenya. Over the years a lot of people have lived there in harmony. But there were injustices and people from the north were prevented from moving freely, and schools were difficult to reach. I was lucky to go to school. After that you have to find a way to get higher education, I was lucky and I did. Now I am the Deputy of the Kenya Red Cross, and I lead an organisation lobbying for the rights of torture victims. During and since the post-election violence we have organised campaigns and we have raised millions from Kenyans in support of their sisters and brothers displaced by the violence'.

Representing only a fraction of all of the myriad peoples who migrate, the group by the East African river make a compelling case for commonalities across the different forms of migration. They make three points to counteract the myths of mobility:

- People living on the move are often active philanthropists within their home and adopted societies;
- Most of their movement is orderly, networked and negotiated;
- Their economic contribution is enormous.

In a recent book compiling evidence on the impact and future of migration, scholars have argued that migration has always driven the advance of human history, economy and cultural development and it does so today with increasing intensity (Goldin, Cameron and Balarajan 2011). Macroeconomic studies of developed countries with significant foreign-born populations have consistently found that migration boosts and sustains growth and increased immigration is aligned with increases in total employment and GDP growth (Ortega and Peri 2009). In 2005, the World Bank estimated that migration up to 2025 would generate global gains of US\$356 billion (World Bank 2005). Recent work on the productivity of pastoralist mobility has indicated substantial and consistent economic and environmental contributions (Hesse and McGregor 2009).

Hussein Mohamed, a Kenyan livestock trader who has one son in Canada, another studying at Nairobi University and two girls at high school in northern Kenya says, 'mobility is not a crime, it's growth for economies. Wherever you go you add to the economy of that place. It's high time the world recognised that mobility is helping humankind'. A vast financial and social contribution to development, the philanthropy of the diaspora is a product of mobility.

## Non-citizens

Public and official attitudes are ambivalent. Fear of disorder, criminality and competition is widespread and often exaggerated by politicians and scaremongers. Sometimes, of course, the fear is justified. However, a little investigation into the way mobility works in all but the more extreme (and often temporary) cases, reveals a remarkable level of orderliness, organisation and negotiation, and it is this that underpins the generosity and energy of migrants and their communities. For East African pastoralists – mobile livestock keepers – this is an approach to life that has been honed over centuries. Molu Kullu, a traditional leader of the Gabra pastoralist group in Kenya, explains, 'the mobility of pastoralist communities is managed: during the rainy season when there's plenty of grass you don't move to the reserve, and you don't move to the sacred areas, instead we direct herders away. Sometimes people on the move may be attacked

and lose animals, but they don't run into towns, they go to the community. People discuss, they give food and it will be agreed how he can be restocked with animals to rebuild his herd. We have no refugees'. Tumul Orto, sitting beside him and assisting with translation, adds, 'it's planned, our moving: people do reconnaissance before moving. We collect information and news, we negotiate, and then we move'. Daoud says, 'it's a complicated science'.

Yet a feeling of exclusion and isolation is common among people on the move. Governments do not offer citizenship; instead they corral, control and reject. 'They think that mobility doesn't make good citizens', says Daoud. 'For me the issue comes down to the centre of nation states and the people on the periphery. The centre believes that to make mobile people good citizens it must settle them. Governments must see you as valuable, either in tax or economic contributions or with political power – they don't help you because they love you. Development and policy narratives haven't changed. Against all the evidence, they say that mobility is backward, uncontrollable and criminal, and they want to settle people and "civilise" them. But we pastoralists pay more taxes than most. We have elaborate systems of movement but the state doesn't want to listen. Nothing is invested in mobility'. Because governance, taxation, service delivery and political boundaries are constructed around fixed places 'the nation state will always fear mobile populations'.

Being non-citizens allows for exploitation or failure to provide for the most basic of human rights. Ola Tanda, a long-legged octogenarian and revered customary leader, sums up the experience of citizenship in northern Kenya at the border with Ethiopia: 'we're very far from Kenya, we don't know Kenya. They send councillors, members of parliament, district commissioners and chiefs – to our opinion these are people who eat us; they trade us'.

Buke Tura Halake, pastoralist and nurse, her red headscarf striking against the yellow bark of the tree, says with emotion, 'talk of non-citizenship! In my work I go on outreach to vaccinate children, treat sicknesses and do health education. We take a vehicle and go. Then we get to the end of the road, and although they've said they are just by the road, they might be 50km away. So you suffer, but finally you reach them. In my area, a woman in labour who needs a caesarean section might have four or five days' travel to reach a facility and then, if she makes it, might need an emergency flight. I've seen such women die in front of me. Is such a person not entitled to the same service as one settled in town? Or a child with a serious burn who can't reach the hospital?'

She pauses. 'When you see such things you think a lot. You wonder whether such people are really citizens, or part of humanity. You get demoralised. People in town don't reach or know about people on the move'.

Keffa, vivid and determined, adds his part. 'In 1992 there was agitation from the multiparty politics in Kenya and on January 1st 1994 my father was killed because of these politics. We had to move. We have had some of the worst displacement experiences ever in this country. Now I'm an activist for justice. We felt we needed to come together as a network of all the victims of displacement in the country and lobby to have a very clear policy framework. With backing we have lobbied for resettlement programmes and other programmes to address the problems of displaced people. The displaced person has been deprived of his rights. The government deny displacement. What kind of justice is there for this mobility?'

Nasaru, sitting beside him, says, 'I'm a peace champion and a woman leader seeking peace with other communities. Our displacement was orchestrated by violence and in the six years since that time we've advocated to government, but not been assisted. When we were at last able to return, we stayed at the market centre for two months with no food, just some mattresses'.

Buke comments drily, 'the government does nothing, so it becomes just survival of the fittest'.

For others there is uncertainty, citizenship is granted and removed, or granted partially. 'I see that a life of mobility has advantages and disadvantages, and governments around the world don't recognise either of them', says university lecturer David Ruach. 'I describe myself as a cosmopolitan nomad, between Addis Ababa and Juba. I was born in 1969 in Gambela, Ethiopia, which was described by the British and the Ethiopians as a no man's land. No one was concerned about it. In 1977 my father took us to Sudan for education. I describe Sudan also as my country'.

Dr Said points out that governments and economies often lose out when they fail to facilitate migrants. 'Professionals find themselves in a difficult situation, they can't work, the legal conditions prevent them, they do all sorts of other jobs than what they trained for'. What works, say these mobile people, is recognition, facilitation and legitimacy. 'The government remains with its system of planning and we remain with ours, that's the problem', explains Molu Kullo. 'Long ago, the colonial government supported and empowered our system. Guards, administrators and traditional rulers all worked together to back the system and we got through every drought without assistance from outside'.

'Free movement of people can be an engine of integration. Why do we see migration through the lens of security?', asks Nuur Mohamud Sheekh, member of the Bravanese community, who lives and works between Kenya, Switzerland and the UK. 'Mobility should be a basic human right', argues Hussein Mohamed. People should not lose their citizenship when on the move. Citizenship enables people to integrate and contribute. It gives them rights to assistance in distress, and responsibilities to conduct themselves according to the law. It liberates their skills as individuals and as whole communities.

## Wellbeing

What does it mean to be well in mobility? Our discussions revealed that not only bodies, but fortunes are mobile. People rely on one another to weather difficulties and grasp opportunities. Mobility is not only the times on foot, on the truck, the boat or the train, but also the times settling in new places, and the times returning home. Mobile people have the skills to move, and often they never completely settle in one place. There are also many who are forced into movement, whose vulnerability is exploited and whose wellbeing depends on settling down and regaining security and justice.

For chosen and forced mobility, its success relies on networks, planning, communication, orderliness, and diplomacy. Nuur Mohamud Sheekh explains how migration works through networks. Even if a person is fleeing from war, he says, the better her networks, the easier her flight. Fowziya, a member of the tight-knit Bravanese Somali community, found her way to England because of these connections. It was Nuur who negotiated with the British government for recognition of the status of the entire community. Networks support the disorientation of unplanned movement. Explaining how it works in the Somali case, Ahmed says, 'the Somali community in Bristol is 25,000 but only those from your family and clan background will help, say with finding you somewhere to sleep, or if you have close relatives you will of course stay with them'.

For people purposefully on the move, prosperity and health are tied to their movement. 'The more mobile you are, the more prosperous you are', says Hassan Galma, a Kenyan trader.

Molu adds that for the pastoralist herders, 'life is uncertain and we have to have a special skill to adapt to these transient resources: that skill is mobility. Without that skill, the transient resources

couldn't be used. To keep things well, our mobility is guided by land, water, pasture, people and rules. If we don't move we risk our lives'.

'Those who don't move get older: at 60 they look 80, while those who are active by still moving look younger. Ola Tanda and I saw an old man his age in town, struggling on a stick asking, "when is the [relief] maize coming?" He is Ola Tanda's age mate, but Ola Tanda is still active and young'.

Wellbeing involves individuals, families, neighbours and societies. Tumul explains, 'we move very fast and far in our pastoralist life. We look for benefits and try not to make difficulties for other people. Sometimes after surveillance and moving we find other people have come to that place too, and there are confrontations. There are rules to deal with these situations and everyone has to abide by them'. Dr Said echoes this belief in rules and laws, 'whatever country you're in you have to respect its law and culture, and also understand and accommodate cultures around you including immigrant ones that come in seeking to integrate. The country too has a responsibility for that integration'.

For every person sitting by the river it is the ability to 'give back' that constitutes one of their greatest forms of wellbeing. Fowziya and Ahmed, for instance, talk of the opportunities to be educated, to make a living and to *give back to society*. Wellbeing as they define it is not only personal, but philanthropic. Each person, in their way, is determined to make a substantial contribution.

## Philanthropic partnerships

'We don't want to have or form any new organisations, we have the structures already - let us ask the international philanthropists to work with them.'

Wellbeing for migrants and their hosts arises in orderliness and cooperation, making the best of skills and entrepreneurship, and getting the greatest value from migrant philanthropy. A partnership between international and mobile philanthropists has the power to create unprecedented leverage. The group by the river batted back and forth ideas on justice, law, conflict resolution, planning, education, health and technology. They asked what might create the sustained political will that would legitimate 'mobile citizenship', improving relations between mobile and settled people, fostering economic contributions and building security, justice, health and welfare. They proposed that these goods can be built on a philanthropic partnership that:

- acknowledges that mobility is an integral part of the modern world and campaigns for understanding mobility as a *human right* – this would include supporting dialogue with governments and major development institutions;

*This is a key area where international philanthropic organisations could use their leverage and reputation as advocates. The question was asked 'how can Bellagio lever the political will?'*

- leverages the economic and social power of remittances and the internal welfare systems of mobile peoples – this would include developing partnerships and strategies with diasporas on the global stage, but also with accountable structures on the micro level;

*Many remittances are targeted at individuals and families. More can be done in cooperation with diasporas who are organising remittances for the collective good.*

- leverages the unique capabilities of deep-rooted community institutions in Africa and the diaspora that function as the guardians of good mobility and wellbeing – this would include support to indigenous conflict resolution and investing in organisations that are accountable to their constituencies;

*International philanthropy would be well placed to make a contribution through its ability to take risks and invest in new approaches.*

- recognises the dislocation and disconnection of people moving in distress – this could take the form of support to legal services, information and rapid reintegration initiatives;
- invests in the technologies that promote the productivity of a mobile life, including information, knowledge and communication systems, face-to-face connections and education systems for people on the move.

*For those on the move (forced or unforced) education has been a longstanding problem with no easy solution. The meeting wanted to see investments in distance learning approaches that could be delivered through mobile technologies.*

## Coda: The meeting, the people and the place

As the participants brought the meeting to a close, Dr Said commented, ‘the environment of normal meetings, big hotels in big cities, really affects the outcomes. There should be more meetings like this, under the shade of a tree’.

Buke said, ‘if you’re used to hunger and then one day you’re told it will go away, you won’t believe it. Or if you’re sick for a long time and you’re told that you’ll get better overnight, you won’t believe it until you see it. So we can just hope that our discussions will cause change and have impact’.

Fowziya read a poem she had scribbled in her tiny notebook. Lightly, cleverly, she wove into it the long journey to get to the meeting place, the extraordinary conversation and the easy agreement. She spoke of inspiration. She said she would remember the meeting forever.

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## The people who debated life on the move at Kinna



**Hassan Galma**  
Trader and ex Councillor from Garbatullah,  
Isiolo County, Kenya



**Buke Ture Halake**  
Active health worker and networker among women  
in mobile communities in northern Kenya.



**Ugas Mohamed Gurrah**  
Traditional Leader of the Gurrah Clan, Ethiopia.  
Hereditary position. Ugas Mohamed is  
20<sup>th</sup> Generation.



**Dr Mohamud Said**  
Father migrated from Somalia to Kenya. President of  
International Rehabilitation Centre for Torture  
Victims. Bravanese Community, Kenya



**Daoud Tari Abkula**  
Political Activist, pastoralist and trader  
from Isiolo, Kenya



**Molu Kullu**  
Traditional Leader of Gabra (highly mobile  
pastoralists) from Bubisa, Kenya



**Ola Tanda**  
Traditional Leader of Gabra (highly mobile  
pastoralists) from Firole on Ethiopia/Kenya border.



**Dr Fowziya Sheekh-Hussein**  
Came to UK as war refugee from Somalia. Member  
of Bravanese Community. Medical doctor.



**Nasaru Kariambu**

Peace-maker from the Ilchamus minority ethnic group in Rift Valley, Kenya who suffered displacement due to conflict.



**Hussein Mohamed Jama**

Prominent livestock trader from northern Kenya. Leader of Livestock Traders' Association in Isiolo County, Kenya.



**Guled Ismail**

Young urban Somali from Jigjiga, Ethiopia with family living across the world.



**Tumul Orto Galdibe**

Mobile Gabra Pastoralist from Maikona, northern Kenya. Famous for camel breeding.



**Ahmed Abdi**

War refugee from Ogaden War to Somalia & UK. Leader of peace and development initiatives in Somali Diaspora and in the Horn of Africa.



**David Ruach Tang**

Ethiopian Nuer. Ex member of Ethiopian Federal Parliament and Minister of State for Transport in Ethiopia. Now teaches at University of Juba.



**Mageni Karuowa Keffa**

Internally displaced person in Kenya since 1993 ethnic violence in the Rift Valley. Community organiser and activist for Kenya IDP Network.



**Nuur Mohamud Sheekh**

Bravanese War Refugee. Horn of Africa Analyst at the Internal Displacement monitoring centre of the Norwegian Refugee Council in Geneva.