

REINTEGRATION EXPERIENCE OF RETURN MIGRANTS IN ETHIOPIA: A CASE STUDY ON SILTE ZONE FEMALE RETURNEES

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ABSTRACT

The literature on reintegration of migration returnees provide an overview of the ideal conditions for the reintegration of returnees, highlighting those factors that are most likely to result in successful reintegration as well as potential obstacles. This study, therefore, was conducted with the purpose of exploring the reintegration experience of female migrants by employing a qualitative cross-sectional method with narrative approach which aimed at capturing the lived and told migration and reintegration stories of the participant returnees. The findings of the study indicated that the returnees encountered numerous reintegration challenges such as lack of employment opportunities, organizing excessive returnees in an enterprise, severe market problem of the sheds (business center) allocated, failure to fulfill infrastructures for the allocated sheds, procedural difficulty to access business start-up loan, inadequacy of the start-up loan repayment grace period, lengthy & non-responsive government bureaucracy, incoherent & inconsistent leadership. Unless the major precursor of migration which is the economic situation of the returnees is adequately addressed, it is highly plausible to witness the vicious cycle of risky migration. Thus, the study asserted that there is a gap in providing adequate and meaningful reintegration assistance which would bring the desired economic empowerment to returnees and to potentially deter the likelihood of remigration, re-victimization and embarrassment to the image of the nation.

Keywords

Migration, Reintegration, Remigration, Returnees, Silte Zone

INTRODUCTION

Over the past four decades, migration trends have grown increasingly complex, the number of female migrants has also steadily risen. Female migrants now constitute nearly half of all migrants worldwide with an overwhelming majority migrating to developed countries. There is therefore now more than ever before a need for documenting and collecting data related to female migrants' experiences from a life cycle perspective, from the time they decide to leave to the time they come back to their country of origin. Recognizing this need, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) jointly organized an expert group meeting on female migrants May 2006 in New York.

Researches also have been invested into understanding integration; the process of migrants adaptation to the country of migration. Various theories of integration have been put forth from pre-eminent migration scholars such as Stephen Castles and John Berry. The field has been rich with discourse and analysis to understand the different dimensions of integration and how

different immigrant groups integrate. In general, return migration, on the other hand, has been less researched. "Return migration is the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration". The fall of the Berlin wall, increasing conflicts in the south, and the high number of asylum seekers in Europe in the 1990s, have all led developed countries to increase their attention on return over the past decade (King, 2000:35-52).

Return is the process of returning, and reintegration is generally the story of what happens next, yet, a decade after King's statement, few studies have actually focused on reintegration. We lack understandings of how people reintegrate and theoretical models to explore the different dimensions of reintegration. This is most likely due to the explicit assumption that there is no story in reintegration. People are returning to their country of origin, their culture, their home, and therefore the process is straightforward. As the above quote demonstrates and research has vividly illustrated in the 1990s in the works of scholars, this is not the case. Return is not merely going home and reintegration is not simply fitting back into your old life. Both of

these phenomena represent processes. Reintegration is a process that takes time, years for some and for others reintegration can never be achieved, which may result in a re-migration (Ibid).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As far as the existing Ethiopian context based knowledge is concerned, in spite of such empirical fact, female, who are in most cases even tempted and known for trying the highly terrifying routes of irregular migration, constituted the least researched groups in migration related studies. Although not at equal level with women, men migrants also face various kinds of unspeakable abuses and exploitations as irregular migrants in the destination countries. However, in spite of these facts, almost all migration related researches which have been conducted on the Ethiopian aspect so far preferred to exclusively focus on female by unequivocally neglecting the other gender group (Abebaw, 2013).

As far as previous research is concerned, the researcher has managed only to get very limited studies which have been focusing on the causes, consequences and experiences (Samuel, 2012). Moreover, the researcher's attempt to find context specific studies that have been done on the reintegration of migrant returnees in general and the reintegration experiences in particular turned out to be futile. Hence, due to such and such factors, the researcher has decided to undertake the research from the scratch entirely relying on the first-hand account of the returnees and extensive reviews of studies which were conducted in the context of the severity of irregular migration, but the issue of reintegration is a less researched area in migration studies, particularly in the case of Africa. It is known that women have different experiences of migration, which logically translates that they will have different experiences upon return and face gendered specific challenges in return. This study thus seeks to make a contribution to understanding

the reintegration experiences of female returnees in the selected study area.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study generally aimed at uncovering the reintegration experiences female returnees. Under the auspices of the general objective, the study aimed at meeting the following specific objectives:

1. To pinpoint the kinds of reintegration assistance services those have been received by female returnees.
2. To identify the major reintegration challenges as encountered by the female returnees.
3. To unveil the interventions needed at various levels in view of adequately addressing the reintegration challenges of the female returnees.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a qualitative cross-sectional methodological approach in view of exploring the lived reintegration experience female migrant returnees in greater depth and to let research participant returnees express their views in broader terms. Qualitative research paradigm is best suited to understand a concept or phenomenon about which little research had been conducted.

The participants were female returnees in the selected Silte Zone weredas namely: *Lanfuro, Silti, Alichu, Sankura, Hulbareg and Werabe town administration*. Besides, in view of triangulating the data obtained from the returnees and in order to ensure further validation for the upcoming findings of the research, key informants from the Site Zone Office of Labor & Social Affairs, Silte Zone office of Micro and Small Enterprises Development, and the Silte Zone Credit and micro finance S.C. was included in the research. As far as the size of the research participant was concerned, in this particular research, 30 returnees for interviews, 21 returnees for small group

discussion (three sessions each containing seven participants) and 6 key informants from purposely selected institutions were included as research participants.

The following inclusion criteria were deployed in the course of selecting the research participants:

- Female migrants of who was amongst the last five years.
- A returnee who had stayed in the migration at least for one year.
- Above all, the participants took part in the study voluntarily and based on their informed decisions to be part of the research and share their lived post-return reintegration experiences.
- Moreover, the inclusion of the key informants was determined, *inter alia*, based on their free consent, institutional mandate, and relevance of the official position, expertise and familiarity with the subject matter under consideration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Normally, post-return reintegration assistances may be of different kinds. In the context of this particular research, following the Saudi Arabian government's crackdown on the irregular migrants nearly over one hundred sixty thousand Ethiopians were evicted forcefully and most of these returnees have received various rehabilitation and reintegration assistances. The assistances were provided by the government, non-governmental organizations and international intergovernmental organizations like the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other stakeholders. During the start of the mass eviction, the government of Ethiopia has allotted a considerable amount of budget and availed various assistances for the returnees. As the exclusive focus of this study was to highlight the case of female returnees residing in Silte Zone, the data obtained from the key informant at the office of Labor and Social Affairs revealed

that, from the entire returnees female takes the lion-share.

According to the key informant at the Silte zone office of Labor and Social Affairs, although the mass deportation of citizens was not anticipated ahead of time, the FDRE Government and the Silte Zone Administration allotted significant budget which was aimed at ensuring successful reunification and reintegration of Saudi Arabia returnees in their country of origin. Among others psychological training aimed at bringing attitudinal change on returnees was offered, skill trainings on various income generating business or vocational fields were given based on the interest of individual returnees, organizing and engaging returnees through micro & small enterprises, startup loan facilitation from credit and finance institution and availing of working Sheds or business centers for organized returnees could be mentioned as the major interventions of the zone administration.

On similar account, the key informant on his part that despite the fact that the Saudi Arabian government's mass eviction was an emergency phenomenon, the government of Ethiopia has done all things possible to warmly receive, resettle and reintegrate the returnees at their specific place of origin. As part of the reintegration endeavor, the government facilitated and offered: psychosocial, entrepreneurial and various skill trainings.

In the same vein, returnees have been organized via micro & small enterprises, received startup loans from micro finances and have started to generate their own income. Besides, those returnees who had been government employees at various levels prior to their migration to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were given the unconditional re-employment opportunities in their previous position. According to the key informant, as a whole, the kinds of the reintegration assistances that have been provided

to returnees may differ from one wereda to the other and he associated the variations of the assistances mainly to the level of utilizable resources available at the time. By the same token, participant returnees have appreciated the government's and other non-governmental stakeholder's initiative for the warm welcoming they were given upon their arrival but they verify that they had received short term reintegration assistances.

Skills Training

Vocational training is often provided to returnees in order to facilitate their economic reintegration after returning to their country of origin. However, the efficacy of such initiatives, in particular on the long-term outcomes of providing vocational training courses to returnees. This requires follow-up with vocational training participants as well as research on the factors that influence livelihood opportunities. Studies emphasize the importance of labor market/ skills assessments for returnees. However, there is little evidence-based research to demonstrate the extent to which such assessments have a positive impact on the economic reintegration of returnees, and on how these assessments should be conducted to ensure that they are effective in facilitating the economic reintegration of return migrants.

Preparation which was his area of interest and also exactly a field that he used to engage in while he was in the Saudi Arabia, moreover, he was offered the chance to sit for COC exam in which they managed to pass, he has also got the opportunity to be organized in micro & small enterprises to involve in the field he received skill training on, being together with other returnees and also got startup loan facilities from the micro finance.

REINTEGRATION CHALLENGES

The post-return reintegration challenges that have been encountered by the participant returnees, which is basically the central focus area of the whole study shall be illuminated. In the normal course of things, migrant returnees may

encounter numerous challenges in the course of reintegrating themselves back into the community and the way of lives they had left behind. The reintegration challenges could be manifested through multifaceted forms. Among the various challenges, the returnees of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have faced the following major reintegration challenges:

Economic Challenge

As per the confirmation of the participant returnees, if not the worst, they came back to the same economic situation which they had left previously. In accordance with the claim of all research participant returnees, even after their return, in spite of the government's support, the economic challenge which had led them to the migration in the first place still has continued to hamper their attempt to successfully reintegrate. In the course of post-return reintegration endeavor, the following points were indicated by the participant returnees as the major factors which were contributing to their economic challenges.

Difficulty to Earn Sustainable Income: Within the context of the economic challenge, all participant returnees pointed out that the failure to generate adequate and sustainable income to live on has affected their likelihood of successful reintegration to a greater extent. In the opinion of the participant returnees, all the other problems being encountered in the reintegration effort are the derivative of the lack of income which is the source of all the other consequential challenges. Those returnees who have been organized and started business indicated the fact that the vast majority of the incomes generated by their business goes to the repayment of the start-up loan and due to this they could not get an income to live on. Most of them testified that this time they are living by expending the money they have brought back from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The major factors as indicated by returnees are discussed underneath:

Inability to Get Employment with the Skill Training: Participants indicated that the skill training that was organized and offered by the government was not as such sufficient to access and compete for other job opportunities. Although certificates were awarded by the government, the various skill trainings delivered at the time was too brief which only stayed for 21 days. However, with such short term vocational and business trainings, some of the returnees faced difficulty to apply and get alternative employment opportunities. Similarly, some other had received the short term training in the Women's Hair dressing which was the sub-field of Modern Trading Works. However, they were not satisfied with the training and did not manage to get the necessary knowhow which could convince them to immediately start working in the field.

Normally, it would be difficult to master the hair dressing skill in a short time and particularly, for learning women's hair dressing in a short time is very difficult. One may learn the skill of women's. Thus, due to the skill training's lack of depth, they were forced to attend additional and broader women's hairdressing skill training on their own initiation paying 1200 ETB a month for five months (Key informat interview,werabe, 2020).

Challenges Associated with Business Start-up Loan

Difficulty to Access Startup Loan: As highlighted by the participant returnees, access for start-up loans is vital in an attempt to successfully reintegrate and ensure the economic independence of the returnees. As it has been illuminated in the preceding sections, the predominant precursor or push factor for the migration was the strong economic improvement aspirations of the migrants. Hence, the opportunity to generate income is the major epicenter of intervention sought particularly, in relation to those economic migrants. After having successfully completed the skill trainings

delivered by the government some of the participant returnees indicated the challenges they came across in accessing micro enterprise start-up loans.

Normally, the Saudi Arabia returnees' attempt to establish their own micro & small businesses could not be realized unless start-up loan accesses are facilitated. Some of the normal credit procedures and requirements of the micro-finances could be somehow complex to be fully met by the returnees. Although some of the regular procedures were promised by city government officials to be relaxed in view of tailoring the same to the specific context of returnees, it has remained to be a challenge for returnees to access the startup loan which they desperately needed to setup and run their own businesses. The real encounter would be worth mentioning at this juncture, at first, they were asked to present a personal guarantee or surety who earns a salary of five thousand birr a month to access the startup loan. But, he did not get a person who was willing to be their guarantee for the loan. After sometime, they attempted to get the loan by presenting a title deed of a vehicle, but still he could not get the loan he hoped for. Finally, due to the insurmountable challenge they had encountered to setup his own business in their home country, they were forced to irregularly re-migrate to the Saudi Arabia for the second time. Unfortunately, after staying only for fifteen days in Saudi Arabia, they was re-deported and again after the second time deportation, he has been trying to secure the start-up loan. Likewise, it would be sensible to point out what returnees have faced in this regard in their own words:

It was asked a personal guarantee to access startup loan and we could not get a person who could be a surety for the loan. we tried to access the loan via reciprocal surety-ship with my colleague involved in another business, but they declined to allow us claiming that the two trade licenses were not similar and this scheme could only be allowed for applicants whose trade license are issued on the

same business category. Hence, we could not start the business and earn a living for the last seven and more months. They also encountered similar problem in his endeavor to secure the startup loan, like others he was required to present a permanent employee as a personal surety or a person who could be a guarantee through handing over their house's title deed. By referring to their specific context, we asked that "who could do that for an unfortunate deportee like us?" interview, werabe, 2020)

In an attempt to get the standpoint of the micro credit institution, they should managed to raise the challenges indicated by the returnees in accessing the startup loans. Accordingly, the key informants at the Credit and Saving S.C. have stated that the loan request of the Saudi Arabia Returnees were treated through the regular credit procedure and categorically refuted the claim that special credit procedures were promised by the institution to be implemented in relation to the case of Saudi Arabia returnees. As per the same source, no special treatment has been given to the returnees other than the mere priority given to them in terms of getting prompt response for their loan request after having fulfilled all the regular loan access preconditions.

Inadequacy of the Loan Repayment Grace Period: The participant returnees who have been organized in micro-enterprises and those who have managed to receive the startup loan claimed that they were forced to start the repayment of the loan immediately without getting adequate grace period at least until their business begins to generate sufficient income for the repayment. In the normal course of things newly established businesses could not generate sufficient income like other businesses that stayed longer in the business. But, in clear breach of this convincing fact, in the cafe and restaurant business were forced to start the monthly repayment of 5,000 (five thousand birr) just at the time exactly when they started the business without getting any grace period at all.

They also faced similar challenge in the repayment of the business start-up loan debts, which did not have an adequate grace period.

Inability to Get Interest Free Start-up Loan: by referring to the promises made by the officials of the city government at the time of their return, some of the participant returnees raised the failure of the micro finance institution to provide interest free loan as a major gap which exacerbated their economic reintegration challenges.

Challenges Associated with Formation of Micro-Enterprises

Excessive Size of Members in a Business: In the opinion of the participant returnees, the arrangement has not taken into account the maximum proceeds to be generated from the business in a situation where all the necessary things are fulfilled. According to the participants, this situation has considerably reduced the income level to be shared among the members and has also led them to think that the likelihood of getting adequate personal income from such business is so minimal.

Market Problem of the Sheds Allocated: Due to the serious market problem of the business center, in most cases after waiting for a customer the whole day, they are forced to throw away the cooked food items. The ongoing chronic market challenge has forced them to pay a high price. Participants pointed out that, owing to the market problem and the government organ's failure to relocate the center despite their recurrent claim for the same, they and the other collaborators in the business, have already lost the hope of working in the country of origin. On similar account, other participants namely also been encountering market problem on the Sheds allocated to them.

Failure to Fulfill Infrastructures for Allocated Business Sheds: Participant returnees also raised the responsible city government organ's failure to fulfill the necessary infrastructure as the other

source of economic reintegration challenges. In this regard, to substantiate the matter further, it would be significant to look into the actual encounters of some of the participant returnees. Accordingly, eleven returnees organized to engage in a cafe and restaurant business with the Shed given to them on the fourth floor of a building around Lanfuro. According to participant's reflection, infrastructures like electricity and water services have not been fulfilled so far and there are no toilet facilities. He questioned in his own words that "how could it be possible to run a cafe and restaurant business in the absence of such critical facilities".

Challenges Associated with Government Bureaucracy

Lengthy and Non-Responsive Government Bureaucracy: Most of the participant returnees harshly blamed the government for its lengthy and response lacking bureaucracy. At this juncture, their real encounter could be worth noting, he was heading repeatedly to the Woreda Administration office in his locality with the hope of getting relocation of the business Shed as the business place which was previously given to them has serious market problem. Despite their recurrent request, still he and his collaborators in the same business could not secure the solution they sought from the government side.

Inconsistent Leadership: The participant returnees expressed the challenges they have continued to encounter in getting coherent and consistent pragmatic response from the respective government organs. The participants claimed that almost all the good promises entered by the key government officials were utterly refuted by those actual implementers at various government offices. Accordingly, most of the research participant returnees harshly blamed the government for failing to honor and keep its promises. At the time of the return, the hope and expectations of the returnees were high. But as the time passes, their hopes and expectations began to fade mainly due to the fact that the government

has failed to keep the promises it pledged to execute as per the claim of most participants.

Thus, the lack of consistency among the various government organs, higher officials and actual implementers at the grassroots level considered to have been placing a challenge on the returnees. At the time of the official reception organized for the returnees and in the following days, especially on the conclusion of the vocational and business trainings offered to returnees, the key government officials, during the occasion promised for various special treatments to be put in place at the respective government offices. But, in contravention to this, those promises did not go down and formally reach the actual implementers.

CONCLUSION

Although the ongoing economic hardship and lack of employment opportunities or lack of sustainable livelihood take the forefront position, the other challenges were also identified by the study as contributing factors for the economic reintegration challenges of the returnees. The first could be those challenges which are associated with the formation of micro-enterprises and among which severe market problem of the sheds allocated, organizing excessive returnees in a micro-enterprise, and failure to fulfill infrastructures for the allocated sheds could be mentioned as the principal ones. Secondly, the challenges which are associated with startup loan could be cited, viz., procedural difficulty to access business start-up loan, and inadequacy of the start-up loan repayment grace period could be mentioned. Still, reintegration challenges could also be associated with the government bureaucracy and of which, lengthy & non-responsive government bureaucracy, and incoherent & inconsistent leadership could be worth noting.

As far as the returnees' future plan is concerned, due to the unbearable economic hardship the participant Saudi Arabia returnees continued to face in their country of origin, most of them are losing hope of changing their lives by working

here and to the dismay of all concerned stakeholders, all of them are thinking of remigration to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or to some other countries for the second time. Almost all of them confirmed that they may continue to live here in their country of origin, only if the ongoing economic reintegration challenges get resolved and in the absence of which, they vowed to pursue ahead with their remigration plan.

Finally, the study participants forwarded the ensuing interventions in view of easing the ongoing reintegration challenges. The participants' principal call lied on the need to resolve the income earning problem of the returnees and also called for the fostering of employment opportunities. Besides, in connection with the market problem of the business sheds, the participants urged for market potential assessment to be undertaken for sheds prior to allocation and also participants recommended for the government to strike a balance between the size of members organized in a micro-business and the income generating potential of the business, and some also called for the relaxation of the start-up loan access procedure. Furthermore, some of the participant returnees urged the government to put in place effective and consistent follow-up on the overall conditions of the micro-businesses and the economic conditions of the Saudi Arabia returnees and still, most of them called for the government to honor the good and favorable promises it entered in relation to the reintegration of the Saudi Arabia returnees. As a final point, some of the participants urged the government to lift the embargo it has placed on the regular migration channel to the Middle East countries and Gulf States in view of mitigating the trend of irregular migrations.

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