

Challenges of Social Reintegration for the 2013 Saudi Arabian Returnees in Ethiopia

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Abstract: Ethiopian nationals living in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) have been compelled to leave the country for causing an increase in the number of unemployed nationals of KSA. The crackdown was planned to create jobs for Saudi nationals by reducing the number of foreign workers. Due to the crackdown of illegal residents by the police, more than 140,000 Ethiopians returned home, as of December 22, 2013. Returnees were duly sent to their families as they arrived in Ethiopia by the provisions of IOM¹ with overnight accommodation. However, reunification of returned migrants to their family and social environment has not been easy. Challenges of reintegration of the returnees to the main stream society vary across individuals. Emotional, health, psycho-social, and feelings of failure to meet family expectations take the lion's share to determine the likelihood and extent of reintegration of returnees. Success to reintegrate depended on whether their migration experience abroad was successful, how they have integrated in the host society and what migration experience they have returned with. The challenges to reintegrate with local people came up with another migration; both intra-national and international. Returnees who did not appropriately reintegrated with the sociocultural environment are found vulnerable to substance abuse, alcoholism, and prostitution. Hopelessness, social isolation and development of low self-esteem prevail in the Saudi Arabian returnees. This study uncovered that reintegration of forced-returned migrants in their country of origin is a tough process. It is more likely to result in another migration and develop socially undesirable conducts.

Keywords: Challenges of reintegration for return migrants, consequences of illegal migration.

BACKGROUND

People migrate across countries for different reasons. Looking for political dependence, exiles due to catastrophes, drought and poverty, warfare, and searching for a better job are among the pushing factors to migrants leave their place of origin (Chobanyan 2013).

Ethiopia has a long history of migration, and return has always been part of the migration cycle. Ethiopians are found almost in every nation of the world. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been one of the prominent destinations for a significant number of emigrants from Ethiopia.

Illegal immigrants, including Ethiopians, entered in different times overwhelmed the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This caused the increase in number of unemployed nationals of KSA which resulted in the crackdown of illegal residents in the country. The crackdown was planned to create jobs for Saudi nationals by reducing the number of foreign workers totaling some nine million people (Yohannes 2013). Due to the crackdown of illegal residents by the police

more than 140,000 Ethiopians returned home, as of December 22, 2013 (Yohannes 2013).

The Ethiopian government, welfare organizations and people worked on transporting migrants back to Ethiopia, receiving at Addis Ababa, accommodating and offering materials for the returnees in the temporary relief camp at Bole International Air Port compound. Returnees were also sent to their families as they arrived in Ethiopia by the provisions of IOM with overnight accommodation, food, water, shoes, and money for transport to their places of origin.

This research explores issues of reintegration of Ethiopian citizens returned from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2013. It discusses the challenges of reintegration for returnees in terms of employment, social, psychological, housing and environmental adaptation.

Why this Study?

Migration studies are as tremendous and legendary as migration itself. The causes (push and pull factors), impacts (positive and negative from the point of view of both receiving and sending contexts), types, and patterns are studied by different scholars. For example, Pankhurst (2005), Gebru and Beyene (2012), Birhan (2011), and Zemen (2014) studied causes and consequences of rural-urban migration from both negative and positive facets, focusing on the experiences of Ethiopia. These scholars have found

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¹International Organization for Migration.

out the pressures in social service centers in urban areas and a multitude of problems directly related to immigrants from rural Ethiopia, to indicate one.

The nature of migration whether forced or voluntary is another aspect of migration that has been the focus of researchers, for the reason consequences of these two types of migration yield largely varied results. One of the apparent results is its impacts on the extent and manner of reintegration of migrants returned to place of origin. Chobanyan (2013) studied the challenges of reintegrating return migrants from Russia to the main stream Armenian community; and Danaj (2012) studied the reintegration of returned Albanian migrants from Germany. However, these scholars studied the reintegration challenges to returning migrants on their free-will in the European context. There has not been any research conducted on the challenges of returning migrants on the social reintegration with their place of origin.

Therefore, this research is conducted and, is anticipated to fill the gap in the exploration of multifaceted problems of reintegration for forced returnees in their place of origin, specifically, in the Ethiopian context. The research focuses on exploring how migrants return to their country of origin, the socio-demographic traits of return migrants, the challenges they face to successfully reintegrate, and outcomes of poor/strong reintegration of returnees.

Purposes and Significance

The overall objective of this research is to explore the challenges of social reintegration of forced return migrants. Presenting the socio-demographic traits and experiences of the 2013 Saudi Arabia returnee Ethiopians helps Identification of the problems for successful reintegration. It also aids the discussion on the vulnerability of returnees to different social evils.

This research is profound in exploring the challenges of reintegrating the 2013 Saudi-Arabian returnee Ethiopians in their places of origin. The vulnerability of returnees to different health risks, social exclusion, depression, and misconduct are crucial issues addressed by the study. It provides insights on the demographic characteristics of returnees, including gender dimensions. This indicates the potential labor force Ethiopia, particularly Addis Ababa, gained from the forced immigration or the impacts on the employment and housing of the main stream society. Furthermore, the study highlights whether the

returnees are important additions or liabilities to the development of the country.

Findings of this research can be important inputs for further studies by scholars who want to ponder deep in to the holistic concerns regarding the economic, cultural, socio-environmental, and vulnerability of returnees to health problems, prostitution, drug abuse, and conditions of poor reintegration.

Conceptualization

This research is based on review of related literatures to return migration and challenges of reintegrating with people and environments of place of origin. This subtitle, therefore, consists conceptualization and operationalization of terms used in the study; key issues in the reintegration of returnees, challenges (employment, housing, socio-psychological), and summary of the reviewed literatures.

Returnee: "In a broader sense return migration is the movement of a person returning to his or her country of origin or habitual residence usually after spending at least one year in another country" (IOM 2011, 85).

In this study the following definition of a returnee will be used: a person who emigrated from Ethiopia and after living abroad for some (short or long) time (legally or illegally) returned (voluntarily or forced) to Ethiopia with an intention to reside permanently or temporarily. The name returned migrants is alternatively used by returnees.

Reintegration is defined as a re-inclusion or the re-incorporation of a person into a group or a process, e.g. of a migrant into the society of his or her country of origin or habitual residence (IOM 2011). In this study, it is a process through which a returnee participates in the social, cultural, economic and political life of his/her country of origin-Ethiopia.

Determinants of the Reintegration of Returnees

Cassarino (2008) argues that migrants' patterns of reintegration are shaped by three interrelated elements: 1) the context of reintegration in the home country, 2) the duration and type of migration experience lived abroad, 3) conditions in the host and origin countries which motivated return, i.e., the pre- and post-return conditions.

Returnee's motivation in migration and return are crucial in calculating the likely outcome of reintegration.

The more the returnee's personal decision actually influences their return, the better their reintegration. Free-will and the readiness to return are two fundamental elements that go to make up return migrants' preparedness Cassarino (2008). Preparedness pertains not only to the free choice of migrants to return home, but also to their readiness to return (Xiquan *et al.* 2004).

Challenges of Reintegration

Employment

For a successful reintegration of returnees the solution for the employment problem is very important. Economic reintegration is the process by which a migrant is reinserted into the economic system of his or her country of origin, and by which he or she is able to earn his or her living (IOM 2011).

According to the experiences of Armenian returning migrants from Russia, most returning migrants have the wish and intention to engage in micro- business activities (Chobanyan 2013). In this regard there is a lack of business skills, knowledge of local legislation, financial and supplementary support. The performance of loans to migrants is worse due to several criteria and inadequate conditions: often they lack a stable income, they lack experience in business, or they do not have a functioning business.

In economic terms, the returned migrants refer to the absence of vacations and job places, as well as to the obstacles to starting their own business (Louise 2012). Reintegration strategies are different for migrants. "Successful" are the migrants, who have managed to save money and start their own business upon return, or those who have obtained skills and knowledge, that helped them to find a job.

Social-Psychological Problems

Social reintegration connotes the reinsertion of a migrant into the social structures of his or her country of origin (IOM 2011). This includes the development of a personal network (friends, relatives, neighbors) and development of civil society structures (associations, self-help groups and other organizations).

Problems such as the jealousy and suspicion of family and friends, high family expectations, limited support to the returnees both financially and emotionally (Chobanyan 2013), put returnees in a difficult psychological situation due to the fact that they

are not ready for return and this is very typical for the forced migrants.

Housing

Housing has been a very serious problem, not only for immigrants but also for permanent resident Ethiopians (FSSEDA² 2013), especially in Addis Ababa where the majority of returnees are absorbed. Houses are primary demands for both business running and residence which returnees are more likely to completely lack, as they possess very meager assets. Certainly, lack of housing could be a reason for re-emigration (Chobanyan 2013).

Summary of Literatures

The reintegration of returned migrants in their country of origin is a tough process. Returnees face tremendous challenges in adaptation of the environment, housing, employment, psycho-social, and feelings of failure to meet family expectations. Success depends, to a large extent, on whether their migration experience abroad was successful, how they have integrated in the host society and what migration experience they have returned with. A successful economic and social experience abroad can be an incentive for fast and efficient reintegration.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study involved participants working in fast food mini-restaurants in and around Addis Ababa. These participants were selected purposively with the help of the first interviewee. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to the participants and up on informed consent, they were interviewed.

The number of participants was determined based on the time available to the study, and the sufficiency of supplied information. Participants were interviewed and their responses were written down in Amharic (tongue of informants) and translated into English for the research report.

Research Approach

To study the lived experience of returnees, hermeneutic phenomenology was used. This approach was employed since it enables description and meaningful interpretation of phenomena as they appear

²Federal Small Scale Enterprises Development Agency.

(Rich *et al.* 2013). Design of the research was cross-sectional, since data is collected from the cases at one point in time.

Sampling Technique

Snowball sampling is used in this study. Because, not all research subjects are easily accessible, unless the clue or lead of others is added. Hence, the researcher started data collection from a Saudi Arabian returnee woman living in the researcher's residence neighborhood who has been working in a fast food mini-restaurant at *Saris*, Addis Ababa. The second and third interviewees are contacted with the address provision from the first interviewee. The other three interviewees are contacted with the help of the third interviewee to make appointments via phone calls. All other informants are accessed and interviewed in this way.

Data Collection and Analysis

The study used unstructured interview questions to guide interviewees. The scope of inquiry includes the process of returning and decisions about reintegrating with "Ethiopian life"; their challenges in socioeconomic circumstances.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Four themes which are common to all participants were emerged after careful analysis of their responses. To avoid the loss of original meaning, the transcribed data were not translated into English until the stage of report writing. To protect the confidentiality of participants Pseudonyms are used.

DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics

All of the cases interviewed are women who aged between 20 to 32 years. The returnees are originated from rural parts of Ethiopia. None of them completed their high school education. They terminated class between 6th-9th grades. Two of the interviewees were never married. The three were married when they were first migrating to Saudi Arabia, but divorced when they were back to Ethiopia. The one is in a relationship, but not institutionalized. Among the three divorced women the two have two children for each.

Experience of Health and Financial Problems

Returnees had been in adverse circumstances since their detention by Saudi Arabian police. They did

not take their salaries by the time they were suddenly taken by police to a custody camp. They experienced severe hunger, assault and embarrassment. *Tsigie* stated the situation as,

That was the time we were not allowed even to urinate and excrete for three days. I was penniless. I was in menstruation period, also. The temperature is not like Addis Ababa; it is very hot. I started to smell ruined the next day, no water to wash, no toilet, nothing was there. That is the unforgettable time I was ashamed of being a female. Because, at least, I would have never faced such a problem, if I were a man.

Once they reached Addis Ababa, the assaults were no more. The weather was fine. But, still diarrhea and anxiety created by hassles were even, exacerbated. *Zemzem* stated her experience at Bole as,

It was only when I arrived at the airport terminal that I started to feel the big crash on my life. I was confused of where to be going, next. I had no relative in Addis Ababa. It is only the Agent who sent me to abroad that I knew in Addis Ababa. Then, everything started to terrify me. Severe diarrhea and common cold started me immediately.

Readiness to Engage In Self-Managed Work

Even though, the aspiration of returnees was to join a better readily available job, they did not have found such a position in Addis Ababa. They were in fact contacted by so many company managers, higher government officials and NGO's to facilitate their employment. But practically, the job opportunities were only for very small number of returnees. The returnees sought to have their own businesses.

Waga explains her readiness to work any job available as follows:

I first met a broker to find me a job. He told me that the jobs may not be attractive. But, I insisted. I can work what so ever available. He then, found me a restaurant to join as a waitress. I worked there for two months, then, started my own.

Adanech had come across different contexts with unemployment. She had been meeting people to find

her jobs. But, ultimately she reached a reality that jobs cannot be found out by other people. It is up to the beholder to know potentials and resources. She narrated her experiences:

I had no job in Ethiopia, before I went to Saudi. I had no job when I was in Saudi too. Because, I did not go to there with formal contract to work. I did it illegally. Things in Saudi were never related to the image I had about it before I reached Riyadh. All of the sudden, police caught me as I was wandering to look for job by the help of Ethiopian friends. Nothing was worse than this time in my life. I was happy to come back to Addis Ababa. I decided to be a house maid in any kind of household. But, thanks to God; I got better. I am now having my own small coffee house.

Interviewees stated it is their pleasure to work any kind of job in Addis Ababa than to work in Saudi Arabia.

Family Re-Unification

Families are still in debit of loans from neighborhoods to cover the airfare and agency payments to send today's returnees to abroad. Families had been anticipating a huge sum of money from the coming back of their children to home. Conversely, the returnees were flat broke. This created anxiety within returnees.

Returnees preferred to live in towns that are not reachable by their relatives and family. Because, people in their place of origin labeled them "broke", harass them, and ignored for civil involvements. Addis Ababa is therefore, the best place to make such anonymity, and they preferred to stay.

The main reason for *Hilina* to divorce and leave her child with her ex-husband is her failure to meet people's expectation- i.e. bringing money from Saudi Arabia when coming back to home. She explained, people gossip her, some told her why she did not take other measures instead of coming back to home with all of her liabilities- for the loans her father got to send her abroad. These things made her nervous in her village and wanted to exile permanently. At the time of the interview, her family did not have information about where she lived. No matter what her father has been in

trouble of the debt, she believed she can pay the loans very soon, working in Ethiopia.

Alem has also encountered unwelcoming faces from her villagers. She had been in Saudi Arabia for a six months' time. The villagers ignored her, and even believe, all what happened was because of her bad luck. People did not approach her; she had no one to talk about what she had come through.

I was very much longing to see people of my village. I wanted to warmly hug and kiss my villagers as I arrived home, but people simply waved their hands and said 'hi'; nothing more. This shocked my head more severely than the assaults in Riyadh.

The lack of psychosocial and emotional support from either family or acquaintances was agonizing that aggravated the anxiety and depression of returnees. Loose relationships with family members wane the emotional reintegration of returnees.

Tendency to Go Back to KSA

The research interviewees indicated that a significant number of returnees are going back to Saudi Arabia, illegally. They escorted significant number of friends to Saudi Arabia recently. There are still going women who preferred their deaths abroad than humiliations by their own relatives, siblings, parents, and neighbors.

All of the interviewees reported they had friends who were returned with them from Saudi Arabia in December 2013, and now left to Saudi Arabia, again illegally. This shows the adversity of forced migration on the reintegration of returnees with local sociocultural environment.

The most recent emigrants from Ethiopia to Saudi Arabia, including those returned by the crackdown, are travelling illegally by ships; according to the interviewees' discussion.

Vulnerability for Risky Behaviors

Not all returnees working in their own mini-restaurants are found to be successful, in terms of engaging in socially desirable activities. *Tsige* informed the researcher that one of the returnees working nearby had already been a prostitute. *Tsige* uncovered to the researcher what her friends do to supplement her income from the mini-restaurant. Nonetheless, the

woman had not been satisfied with assistances, nor had a hope to prosper like her friends.

The researcher re-interviewed Zemzem focusing on the behaviors of *Aziza*. Zemzem confirmed that, it has been true; *Aziza* is engaged in substance abuse, alcoholism, and adultery. Interviewees on the issues of *Aziza* indicated that, such behaviors of her were very recent occurrences. She was a house maid when she was in Saudi Arabia. Zemzem explained that everyday activities of *Aziza* are nothing but consequences of hopelessness.

She drinks too much. She is always intoxicated. She also has innumerable sex partners; they are different every day. I think she is paid for that also. She usually cries when we approach her to talk about our lives.

The researcher went through all possibilities to meet *Aziza*, and gather information. Accordingly, the researcher met *Aziza* and requested to have little time for the interview. *Aziza* started talking,

That is all true; people told you that I am a prostitute. I know they gossip me all the time. Yes, I drink; I smoke; I eat; I sex; I live; then, I die. This is my life! Leave me alone now!

She shouted and cried out.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Challenges of reintegration of the Saudi Arabian returnees to the main stream Ethiopian society vary for different individual returnees. Emotional, health, psycho-social, and feelings of failure to meet family expectations take the lion's share to determine the likelihood and extent of reintegration of returnees.

Success depended, to a large extent, on whether their migration experience abroad was successful, how they have integrated in the host society and what migration experience they have returned with. In fact, their readiness and determination to work and prosper in Ethiopia also helped to form their own sub-group. They are engaged in similar jobs- i.e. fast food services.

Returnees who did not appropriately reintegrated with the sociocultural environment are found to be vulnerable to substance abuse, alcoholism, and

prostitution. Hopelessness, social isolation and development of low self-esteem prevail in the Saudi Arabian returnees. Overall, reintegration of forced-returned migrants in their country of origin is a tough process. It is more likely to result in another migration and vulnerability to develop socially undesirable conducts.

The challenges to reintegrate with local people came up with another migration; both intra-national and international. Some returnees went back to Middle East, illegally, in search of better job; while others lived in towns different from their birth place. This is the consequence of failure to reintegrate with their original community. This poor reintegration, instantly, resulted in the illegal migration of returnees to Saudi Arabia again. It is, now, coming to be a motion of the pendulum; as migrants are unstoppable to move from their places of origin to destination, and return by force.

Because, recently in May 2017, Saudi Arabia, for the second time, took action to evacuate illegal residents in the country, of which the majority are believed to be the 2013 returnees. This indicates the academic milieu to theorize Migration again, and the governments to design psycho-social, economic and environmentally adaptable alternatives to alleviate international migration hitches.

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