

The Socio-cultural and Economic Conditions Contributed to Illegal Migration in Omo Nada District, Jimma Zone, Oromia National Regional State, South West Ethiopia
Condições Socioculturais e Econômicas que Contribuem para a Migração Ilegal no Distrito de Omo Nada, Zona Jimma, Estado Regional Nacional de Oromia, Sudoeste da Etiópia

Las condiciones socioculturales y económicas contribuyeron a la migración ilegal en el distrito de Omo Nada, zona de Jimma, estado regional nacional de Oromia, suroeste de Etiopía

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Abstract

Despite the fact that factors contributed to illegal migration (migrant smuggling and human trafficking) vary from context to context, there is scant of information for Omo Nada district, Jimma zone, Oromia National Regional State, South West Ethiopia. Thus, this study tried to explore the socio-cultural and economic factors that contributed to illegal migration of returnees to Omo Nada district. To this end, in-depth interviews, key informant interviews and focus group discussions were undertaken to collect qualitative data required for the study. The data was transcribed and analyzed thematically. Accordingly, the results of the findings showed that poverty, unemployment, lack of skills, influence of brokers/smugglers/traffickers, family pressure, religious and absence of legal means particularly for males are the major complex and reinforcing factors that gave rise to the illegal migration of the study participants. The returnees' subjective experiences of these factors and the meaning they gave to migration such as "means to escape poverty, alternative way to success and a key to unlock poverty" also motivated them to migrate.

Key words: illegal migration; human trafficking; Omo Nada, migrant smuggling; returnees

Resumo

Apesar do fato de que fatores contribuidores para a migração ilegal (contrabando de migrantes e tráfico de seres humanos) variam de contexto para contexto, há pouca informação sobre o distrito de Omo Nada, zona de Jimma, Estado Regional Nacional de Oromia, Sudoeste da Etiópia. Assim, este estudo tentou explorar os fatores socioculturais e econômicos que contribuíram para a migração ilegal de retornados para o distrito de Omo Nada. Para este fim, foram realizadas entrevistas em profundidade, entrevistas com informantes-chave e discussões em grupo para coletar dados qualitativos necessários para o estudo. Os dados foram transcritos e analisados por temas. Assim, a análise dos resultados mostra que a pobreza, desemprego, falta de habilidades, influência de corretores/contrabandistas/traficantes, pressão familiar, religiosas e ausência de meios legais, particularmente para os homens, são os principais fatores complexos e reforçadores que deram origem à migração ilegal dos participantes do estudo. As experiências subjetivas dos retornados desses fatores e o significado que deram à migração, como “meios para escapar da pobreza, caminho alternativo para o sucesso e uma chave para liberar a pobreza”, também os motivaram a migrar.

Palavras-chave: migração ilegal; tráfico humano; Omo Nada, contrabando de migrantes; retornados

Resumen

A pesar de que los factores que contribuyen a la migración ilegal (tráfico de migrantes y trata de personas) varían de un contexto a otro, hay poca información sobre el distrito de Omo Nada, la zona de Jimma, el Estado Regional Nacional de Oromia y el suroeste de Etiopía. Por lo tanto, este estudio trató de explorar los factores socio-culturales y económicos que contribuyeron a la migración ilegal de los retornados al distrito de Omo Nada. Con este fin, se realizaron entrevistas en profundidad, entrevistas con informantes clave y discusiones de grupos focales para recopilar datos cualitativos requeridos para el estudio. Los datos fueron transcritos y analizados temáticamente. En consecuencia, los resultados de los hallazgos mostraron que la pobreza, el desempleo, la falta de habilidades, la influencia de los corredores / traficantes / traficantes, la presión familiar, los religiosos y la ausencia de medios legales, especialmente para los hombres, son los principales factores complejos y de refuerzo que dieron origen a lo ilegal. Migración de los participantes del estudio. Las experiencias subjetivas de los retornados de estos factores y el significado que dieron a la migración como

"medios para escapar de la pobreza, una forma alternativa de éxito y una clave para desbloquear la pobreza" también los motivaron a migrar.

Palabras clave: migración ilegal; trata de personas Omo Nada, el tráfico de migrantes; repatriados

1. Introduction

“Illegal migration”¹ (also known as irregular migration) refers to the entrance and residence of individual/s in another country without having or receiving legal authorization from the host state to do so (International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2010). Illegal migration involves crossing of borders without complying with the requirements for legal entry into the receiving state. It takes place outside the norms and procedures established by states to manage the orderly flow of migrants into, through and out of their territories (International Organization of Migration, 2003). “From the perspective of destination countries, irregular migration is illegal entry, stay or work in a country, meaning that the migrant does not have the necessary authorization or documents required under migration regulations to enter, reside or work in a given country. From the perspective of the source country, the irregularity is seen, for example, whenever a person crosses an international boundary without a valid passport or travel document or does not fulfil the administrative requirements for leaving the country (Bisrat, Teklebrhan, Woldeabrah & Muuz, 2017).

Illegal migration is a subcategory of international migration. Its distinguishing feature is its illegal status which the rules adopted by national governments and international organizations defines (United Nations University, 2003).

The two major types of illegal migration are migrant smuggling and human trafficking. The smuggling of migrants and human trafficking have become widespread, their causes being deep-rooted in the socio-economic and political structures of societies (Human Smuggling and Trafficking Centre, 2006). In countries characterized by deep-rooted poverty and an inability of governments to provide employment opportunities for their citizens, many people

¹While illegal migration is globally acknowledged to be a growing problem, estimating the numbers of people who are smuggled or trafficked every year is problematic. The covert and illegal nature of smuggling and trafficking makes both phenomena difficult to provide accurate estimates of their incidences (Native, McClain & Stacy 2010:243). Estimates are inconsistent and are likely to be gross underestimates.

consider some form of migration as the only available option to improve their livelihoods. Most countries, however, have restrictive immigration policies despite abject poverty and lack of employment opportunities, and despite the demand for cheap labour in other countries. These circumstances drive some to choose illegal migration, which potentially makes them vulnerable to a range of human rights abuses, including labour and sexual exploitation, violence, detention and even killings in transit and host countries (International Organization for Migration [IOM], (2011); International Labour Organization [ILO], (2011).

Up to 1,500 persons depart daily as part of legal migration, but there is widespread evidence that illegal migration (both migrant smuggling and human trafficking) is prevalent in Ethiopia and operates clandestinely (ILO, 2011). Between mid-2014 and mid-2015, the Federal Police in Ethiopia investigated some 400 cases of human smuggling and imprisoned more than 200 of the smugglers (Sahan Foundation and Intergovernmental Authority on Development, 2016). The Ethiopian government also assisted in the identification of more than 3,000 trafficking cases and convicted 69 traffickers under the new Ethiopian anti-trafficking law (US Department of State 2016:167). Many people leave their homes and families every year in search of economic opportunities that are not available to them in their home countries. They often make the decision to emigrate based on false information provided by smugglers and brokers regarding the lucrative employment opportunities and better pay abroad or destination countries (Jayasree, 2004).

Many young Ethiopians transit illegally through Djibouti, Egypt, Somalia, Sudan, or Kenya to the Middle East every year to seek work in the Middle East (US Department of State, 2015). A joint study conducted by the Danish Refugee Council and Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (2012) revealed that Ethiopian irregular migrants represented over 75% of all maritime arrivals in Yemen in 2011. Over 75,000 Ethiopians arrived at Yemen's coast in 2011 of which about 56,000 of them entered Yemen to get to Saudi Arabia. The study also reported that over the past six and a half years, the cumulative number of new arrivals from Ethiopia was estimated to be at least 230,000 (Danish Refugee Council and the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, 2012).

Saudi Arabia receives the largest number of illegal migrants from the Horn of Africa in general, and from Ethiopia in particular. Over the last three years, between 100,000 and 200,000 Ethiopians migrated to Saudi Arabia annually through regular labour migration. Estimation indicated that the number of irregular Ethiopian migrants is double the size of the

regular migrants (The Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat 2014:9). Over 400,000 Ethiopians, including some trafficking victims, reside in Saudi Arabia (US Department of State, 2016).

The driving factors for illegal migration are often deep-rooted in the socio-cultural and economic contexts. However, these driving factors may vary from context to context and involves exploring the life experience of people involved in such phenomena. Despite the fact that these conditions vary from place to place, there is dearth of information regarding the socio-cultural and conditions that compelled people to migrate illegally from Omo Nada to the Middle East countries specifically to Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this study explores the life experience of illegal migration returnees to Omo Nada district, Jimma Zone, Oromia National Regional State, Jimma Zone, South West Ethiopia. The study tries to answer the research question “what are the socio-cultural and economic experiences of the returnees before illegal migration?”

1.1.The smuggling-trafficking continuum

The legal definition given by the Palermo Protocol clearly demarcates the distinction between migrant smuggling and human trafficking. However, it oversimplifies the voluntary and involuntary nature of the two terms. In reality, it is very difficult to make a clear cut between the two. While there are clear-cut cases of trafficking when a migrant is forced and trafficked against his/her will for the purpose of exploitation, most of the cases are very complex and defy any kind of easy categorization. For instance, many prostitutes leave their country of origin with full consent but often find themselves in an exploitative situation (Andrijasevic, 2004). Similarly, there are situations where the smugglers deceive or maltreat the smuggled person against the contract or promise to help him/her to reach safely wherever he/she wants. Hence, the smuggled persons may become victims of trafficking during or even after the migration process. This makes it hard to draw a clear line to demarcate the two phenomena (Van Liemt, 2006).

2. Research Methods

2.1 Study Group and Key Informants

The population for this study was the returnees of illegal migration from Saudi Arabia in 2013 to Omo Nada District. I applied the concept of data saturation and conducted 20 in-depth interviews with returnees of illegal migration. I used the purposive sampling technique to

select 20 study participants from returnees deported by the Saudi Arabia and returned to Omo Nada in 2013. Of these, 16 (sixteen) were males and only 4 (four) were women. Men constitute the majority of the returnees to Omo Nada compared to women.

The District Labour and Social Affairs Office, which works closely with returnees of illegal migration, identified a number of returnees to Omo Nada District. I purposively selected and interviewed returnees who were voluntarily. In addition to their willingness to participate, other criteria used to select the participants were their age and time of their return. Due to the added vulnerability of child returnees, I selected only participants above the age of 18 to participate in the study. In terms of the time of return, as a large number of migrants officially returned to Ethiopia by Saudi Arabia in 2013, they were included in the study. This helped the researcher get many voluntary participants.

2.2 Methods of data collection

In-depth interviews, key informant interviews and focus group discussions were the qualitative research methods I used to undertake the study.

I interviewed twenty participants. The sample size of the study participants for the in-depth interviews was determined based on the concept of the data saturation point. The interviews lasted between 27 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes. I used a digital voice recorder to record the interviews.

I also conducted five key informant interviews with one expert in each of the following offices: Omo Nada District Labour and Social Affairs Office, Youth's Affairs Office, Women and Children's Affairs Office, Police Office and one non-government organization working on returnee reintegration. Finally, I conducted two focus group discussions (1 all-male and 1 all-female) discussions separately, which each consisted of 12 individuals. The participants of the focus group discussions were community leaders, religious leaders, elders, men and women. I selected the FGD participants based on the depth of their knowledge about the reintegration responses made for the returnees and the returnees' current reintegration situation.

2.3 Methods of data analysis

After the data was transcribed and coded, I used thematic analysis to analyze the data. I developed the themes based on the research objectives and repeated patterns of meanings in

the data. Pseudonyms are used in order to keep the study participants' confidentiality wherever narrations are directly quoted.

2.4 Trustworthiness of the data

Morrow (2005) argues that one of the mechanisms to achieve credibility in qualitative study is prolonged engagement with the study participants. For this purpose, I spent five months in the field site. This helped me become familiar with my study participants and gain an understanding of their experiences and the contexts in which they lived.

The other technique suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is member checking. Member checking is a process whereby a report of specific descriptions is taken back to the participants to confirm its accuracy (Creswell, 2009). To ensure trustworthiness of the data in this regard, I went back to the study site after data collection and transcription to read the transcribed data to the study participants to validate the data.

Shenton (2003) advises that in order to address the dependability issue more directly, the researcher should report in detail the process of the study, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same result. To this end, I tried to document clearly and presented all the procedures I followed to carry out the study to ensure the dependability of the study. I hope that this can pave the way for the replication of the study by somebody else.

3. Findings and analysis

3.1 The socio-cultural and economic factors contributed to illegal migration in the study area

Illegal migration is rarely due to free will. Rather, it is deep-rooted in the social structure. In other words, the socio-cultural, economic and political factors beyond their capacities to control forced them to move. Therefore, in this chapter I explore the contextual factors that gave rise to the illegal migration of the study participants and their individual experiences of those factors thematically.

3.1.1 Poverty

Poverty was one of the major contributing factors that forced the study participants to migrate illegally. The study participants experienced abject poverty, a situation in which they lacked a minimum income and resources to fulfil daily survival needs for themselves and their

families. They were unable to provide adequate food, clothing and shelter for themselves and their families within their home communities for a long period.

Having no alternative ways to meet their basic survival needs within their communities, they resorted to illegal migration as the only option to satisfy survival needs and improve their situation. Almost all of the study participants mentioned that poverty was the major reason for their illegal migration. They expressed how poverty forced them to leave their families, home community and migrate illegally to Saudi Arabia below. One participant revealed his destitute circumstances as follows:

I was so poor. My family and I were surviving on the meagre income I was earning from rarely available daily labour. Being poor, I could never provide adequate food and clothing for my family and myself. My children rarely had three meals a day whatever the quality of the food was. On many occasions, they missed either breakfast or lunch. We all used to wear tattered clothes and were living in demolished house for a long time. My children were often ill and could not get timely medical treatment, as I had no money. I was so tempted, and overall life became bitter to me. Due to these, I decided to migrate abroad illegally in order to get employment with better pay and come out of that destitute life condition. For me, migration was a means to say good-bye to poverty (Abdulbasit, male, 37 years).

Poverty and the persistent wretched living conditions they experienced made many of them hopeless and desperate to leave their community. The following narrations from the other study participants testify to the fact that poverty as the major push factor that drove people to illegal migration. The study participants described the difficulties in acquiring income for survival as:

My life was just from hand to mouth. I had no regular means of income as I had no job and no assets. I used to engage in daily labour to earn a wage and secure a little food for our daily survival for a long time. The daily wage was too small to cover basic needs for my families. Even earning that small wage itself gradually became very difficult as the daily labour became less available due to the increase in the number of job seekers in the community and the few available jobs. My life and that of my families went on deteriorating. I had two wives and seven children. I was the head of my families, but I had nothing to

feed, clothe, buy educational material and send my children to school. It is sad to see the sufferings of one's own family. Poverty is disgraceful. I felt sad for my inability to provide essential things for my children and my wives. Generally, I became hopeless. I then started to think of alternative ways to overcome that destitute life. While I was contemplating what I should do to come out of poverty, I came across people who had similar problems in my community. We discussed our situation and any available alternatives to improve our lives a lot. Finally, we reached the conclusion that we had to migrate illegally as we had no other alternative in our community. At that time, migration was the only way to success for me. (Abdushukur, male, 38 years).

Tahir's desperate life situation and his hope for a better life in the future were the driving force behind his illegal migration to Saudi Arabia.

I tried a lot, but I could not improve my family life working and earning that money from daily labour. That was why I decided to migrate through the route facilitated by brokers. Before my journey, I heard from the brokers that Saudi Arabia was the place where anybody could easily get a job with better pay. So I thought that I would really obtain the type of job I want, earn much money and improve my life and that of my family. I had planned to accomplish many things that I thought would improve my and my family's situation within a short period of time. For instance, I had plans to construct a house in Jimma town, buy a car, open a shoe boutique for myself and support my poor families with the rest of the money. As the information I got from the brokers, migration to Saudi Arabia was the only good way I had to achieve all those plans. But all of those ambitions were left in the air as I came back empty handed (Tahir, male, 34 years).

Another respondent described the way in which poverty prevented him from fulfilling his dreams and to drove him to migrate illegally:

Poverty was the main cause for my illegal migration abroad. I had a dream to work, earn better income and live a better life here in my country. To that end, I had a plan to open a small shop and grow it gradually. However, I could not get seed money. My family was too poor to help me start my own business and

actualize my dream. I also searched for employment but did not succeed. Getting employment was very difficult for even those who had completed a college education, let alone for people like me who have no adequate formal education and training. Finally, I realized that I could not start my own business, get income and actualize within my country. I found that it was very difficult to realize my dream due to poverty. I exhausted all possible means and illegal migration became the last resort for me. It seemed me that illegal migration was the only available key for me to unlock the life challenges I faced due to poverty (Mamadson, male 25 years).

Seifu had also described how poverty and the lack of any means of generating income and improving his life in his place of origin forced him to migrate illegally to Saudi Arabia:

I had no farmland to cultivate crops and no money to trade with or engage in any form of economically gainful activities. My family and I were living a destitute life. We could not get three meals a day let alone other things. While I was thinking about what I should have to do to come out of that difficult condition, I got information from friends and brokers about the availability of a job and better pay in Saudi Arabia. I shared the existence of such opportunities with my parents and consulted them about migrating. As my parents' situation was also hopeless due to poverty, and they knew of successful stories of other people who had been to Saudi Arabia, it did not take them too much time to agree with my idea. They immediately accepted my quest to go to abroad and gave me their consent. A week after I consulted them and got approval, I migrated illegally to Saudi Arabia in order to change my life and that of my families instead of suffering here throughout my life. I believed that migration was the only life changing means I had (Seifu, male 25 years).

Even if one had agricultural land, productivity of the land had decreased greatly because over cultivation for a long period depleted it. Therefore, it is very difficult to produce enough food. One respondent explained the difficulties in working on his degraded land and paying back a government loan for fertilizer as follows.

Illegal migration was not a matter of choice for me. Rather, it was the only opportunity I had at that time. I had small plot of farmland. The land was completely degraded and depleted as it had been cultivated for a long period. I could not produce any crops for my families without applying fertilizer. So I used to buy fertilizer at high cost from the government. As I could not pay the entire price for fertilizer at one time, I was getting it in the form of a loan from the government. Because the price of fertilizer was so high I could not pay the government loan by selling the small food crop I was producing from the small plot of land with the application of fertilizer. As a result, I fell into debt and migrated to Saudi Arabia to work and earn income to pay the government loan and improve the situation of my family. Otherwise, I might be I accused and even imprisoned by the government for my failure to pay back the loan (Seman, male, 36 years).

The size of land owned by farmers was too small and that having farmland was not a guarantee for one to produce adequate food for ones' own needs as one of the study participants described.

The size of the land owned by many farmers in our community has been subdivided among generations and has become too small. For instance, I had a small plot of land I inherited from my father. As the size of the land was too small, I could not produce an adequate amount of food for my family and we were suffering a lot because we could not produce enough food for our survival needs. Lack of adequate food due to the lack of farmland coupled with lack of other alternative employment opportunities within the community forced me to leave my family and migrate to Saudi Arabia (Abdulbasit, male 37 years).

A female respondent also explained how deep-rooted poverty limited her ability to fulfill basic survival needs and lead to illegal migration:

I was a child of a poor family. My father died leaving five children, including me, when I was 9 years old. Our mother faced many challenges bringing my siblings and I up. She travelled long distances carrying firewood to sell on her back to sell and buy our daily needs to survive. When I grew up, my needs also grew. I needed to eat better and be better dressed, but I did not even have

a coin to buy hygienic materials like soap and hair oil. I searched for employment, including daily labour, to fulfil my basic needs and support my mother. Nevertheless, I could not get anything. I faced many challenges. Hence, I became hopeless and migrated abroad through brokers to get employment, to bring changes for myself, my mother and my siblings (Mishel, female, 27 years).

In the same manner, both female and male FGD participants described that poverty is one of the major factors contributing to the illegal migration of a large number of people to Middle Eastern countries particularly Saudi Arabia. The participants also emphasized that the government and all concerned bodies operating in the district should support the community by creating employment opportunities other than agriculture in order to tackle the deep-rooted poverty. The key informant from Labour and Social Affairs Office of the district added that due to a shortage of farm land, land degradation, poverty and unemployment, a number of people in the district have become poorer and poorer over time. The community in the district has little opportunity to improve themselves. Due to these factors, whatever means of migration has become the last resort and coping strategy for many people to survive.

3.1.2 UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment is another contributing factor to illegal migration. The study participants had experienced chronic unemployment in their place of origin for a long time before migrated illegally. They tried to get employment, but they could not get the opportunity within their community for various reasons. One of the reasons was that there was little/no job opportunity because the market lacks the capacity to provide the opportunities for all job seekers. Another reason was that families and relatives had no capacity to assist unemployed family members to start their own business, as they themselves were poor. Moreover, the job seekers lacked the knowledge and skills required to get the few employment opportunities available in government organizations or the public sector. Many of the returned migrants explained that they made efforts to get work in their country before they decided to migrate illegally but with no success. One of the study participants articulated the failure to get any work and the subsequent decision to migrate illegally as follows.

Life was very difficult as my parents were poor. I stopped going to school after I completed grade 7 to work and support my family. I used to start early in the

morning and roamed here and there in a nearby small town to search for employment. I searched for more than two years but I could not get anything. As almost everybody in our district was searching for employment, it was very difficult to get even daily labour. Many people were seeking employment; however, very few were fortunate enough to get it as there were few opportunities. Despite all my efforts to get employment, I stayed without any job for a solid two years. However, I was young enough to work and responsible to fulfil my own needs, I became very dependent on my poor parents for everything due to lack of any employment opportunity. As a result, I was disappointed and turned my attention to illegal migration (Yahiya, male, 24).

I took the Ethiopian General School Exit Exam and completed grade 10. However, I was not fortunate enough to score an adequate score to continue my preparatory and university education. My family could not help me establish my own business as they were poor. I searched for employment for three years; however, I could not get work because there were few employment opportunities available in the community. Getting employment in our community was as hard as getting into heaven as there were few opportunities available compared to the number of job seekers. It was even very difficult for university graduates themselves let alone for people who had completed grade 10. I stayed jobless for three years because of these reasons. As time went on, things started to get worse. Previously, I sometimes had daily labour and getting something for my daily bread. However, getting daily labour itself became very difficult. I became hopeless and started to chew khat with friends, hiding from my parents. One day while we were chewing khat and talking among my friends about what we should do to get employment, one of our friends brought up the idea of migrating abroad. We discussed the idea and thought that it was good idea. Finally, we decided and migrated illegally through brokers (Tayib, male, 35 years).

Even if individuals make efforts to establish their own business, the country's tax is too high for many poor people to succeed in their business and overcome poverty as understood from the experiences of some returned migrants who participated in the study. As the government requested them to pay taxes higher than the profit they get

from their business, the capital to run the business gradually decreases. Fares describes his problems with having his own business:

I had no regular job for many years because there was no employment opportunity. After many challenges, I tried to run my own business. I opened a small retail shop. After a year, the government levied high taxes on my business before the business returned even the initial cost I invested let alone any profit. As a result, I was so frustrated and was forced to sell the shop to pay the tax for fear of imprisonment. The business gradually dwindled. Finally, I left empty-handed, became disappointed and chose illegal migration as a means to search employment elsewhere for survival (Fares, male, 45 years).

Mensur also describes the survival challenges in his community:

The lack of an employment opportunity was the main reason that forced me to migrate illegally. The livelihood for almost all families in our community was based on subsistence agriculture, which was from hand to mouth. Our family had a small plot of land to cultivate because the land was sub-divided among generations from time to time and became smaller and smaller. My parents had eight children, including me, and we all were working on that small piece of land. As the piece of land was so small, its production was also very small, and it was difficult to feed our family throughout the year. Therefore, my father prepared and sold charcoal while my mother carried firewood to the nearby small town to earn a supplementary income for our daily survival. I had to engage in business other than agriculture and support my parent's meagre income. Even though I tried a lot to search for employment for a long time, I could not succeed. Consequently, I decided to migrate to Saudi Arabia illegally as other youths in our community were doing (Mensur, male 32 years).

Even though getting employment opportunities was difficult for everybody in the community, the situation was worse for females as for the most part they lacked the minimum education at least to apply for the few available vacancies. It was also more difficult for women to start their own business and improve their situation compared to men in the community. Although the government has been making efforts to ensure equal access to education and employment for women in principle, a lot is still left to

the community in general and the family; in particular, to support girls' education. For example, many girls in the community are still not attending school because of lack of support from their families and this hampers their access to obtaining formal employment compared to men. Fedila and Mishel described the situation of women in their community:

Getting an employment opportunity within our community was very difficult for the educated male let alone for a female who has no formal education at all like me. Many girls never attended school in our community when I was a school aged child and many girls are still not attending school due to lack of permission and support from their families. Many families in our community still think that the only appropriate thing girls need to learn is how to manage household chores. I do not mean that it is wrong to teach girls how to manage domestic activities. But I mean that the fate of girls should not be limited to this. They should also get support from the families like the male children do to get a formal education as lack of formal education is hindering many women from competing for the few available employment opportunities. For instance, I never got a formal education because my parents were not willing to send me to school, like they did my brother, when I was a child. Because I could not compete for the few available formal employment opportunities in the community because of the lack of a formal education, I ended up with migrating illegally (Fedila, female, 35 years).

Mishel recounts the lack of opportunities for women to obtain employment or to start their own business as:

A woman has little or no chance of securing employment in our community for various reasons. One of these reasons is that traditionally our communities do not give equal opportunities for females to attend school like the males. The other reason is that as many women are always busy with household activities, they lack time to engage in economically gainful activities to generate income for themselves and their families. It is, therefore, very difficult for them to start their own business. These are the reasons that many women remain unemployed and poor in our community. My mother was very busy with household activities and caring for children while my father was alive. As a result, she could not get and save income at least for difficult times, as she told me. Hence, she automatically surrendered herself to poverty and took firewood to sell at the market to secure

income at least for our daily survival after our father died. Had she had the opportunity to work and accumulate income she would have been able to engage in other activities to change our lives and save herself from carrying firewood. This should have in turn enabled her to educate or help me engage in my own business as she told me. If I had been able to get an education or get support from my mother or somebody else I would have either got employment or started my own business and would never have resorted to illegal migration (Mishel, female, 27 years).

Responses from both FGD participants confirmed that employment opportunities are very limited in the study area, especially for youths with little or no formal education. The few employment opportunities in public sectors are not even adequate to absorb the university graduates, much less individuals with less formal education. There are no investment activities which create employment opportunities particularly for unemployed youths who have completed high school. Most families are poor and have five to ten children. Families have no financial or material resources to establish income-generating activities for their economically active children to fulfil their needs. Families themselves expect support from their children when they grow up. In the absence of employment or other means of generating income, illegal migration has become the only available alternative for the youths to obtain employment to fulfil their own needs and their families' expectations as understood from the focus group discussions. Therefore, the male FGD participants specifically emphasized that the government should attract investments and big projects to the district in order to create employment opportunities for the unemployed people.

Responses from key informants were similar to those of the returned migrants and the FGD participants regarding unemployment as one of the major driving forces for the illegal migration of many people from the study area to Arab countries (specifically Saudi Arabia). The key informant from Omo Nada District Police Officer stated that youth unemployment went beyond an economic problem and was the cause of frequent political instability in the district. Youth unemployment has also become the cause for the recurrent mass riots against the government. The widespread unemployment-induced public demonstration against the government from August to October 2016 was evidence of the fact that unemployment became the cause of political instability in the district according to the police key informant.

Available literature also witnesses the fact that the high prevalence of unemployment in Ethiopia is one of the major contributing factors for many people to migrate illegally. Muhidin (2016) reported that unemployment is one of the most serious social problems in Ethiopia particularly among the youths due to inadequate institutional attention for youths' employment from the government, lack of business skills, and shortage of finance and lack of work place to create their own employment among the job seekers. (Muhidin, 2016). The labour market in Ethiopia also lacks the capacity to provide employment opportunities for many people contrary to the huge number of job seekers in the country (Fitsume, 2014).

Though some people try to establish their own business, it is difficult for them to be successful as the government tax is too high to the extent that it forces people to sell their income generation source to pay their bill and end up in illegal migration (The Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, 2012). Poor employment opportunities coupled with low pay and high taxes versus the expensive cost of living in the country are the major economic drivers influencing many people to migrate illegally from Ethiopia (Martha, 2012; ILO, 2011).

3.1.3 INFLUENCE OF BROKERS/ SMUGGLERS/TRAFFICKERS

There is no clear distinction between brokers, smugglers and traffickers (commonly known as *dalalas*) in Ethiopia. The widespread existence of *dalalas*, together with poverty and unemployment, created a fertile environment for the prevalence of illegal migration in the study area. The local brokers/smugglers/traffickers are people who move throughout the community, disseminate information and recruit people for illegal migration. Recruiting people for illegal migration is highly lucrative for brokers as they are easily able to exploit the miserable living conditions of people and deceive and recruit them by telling them stories of the successes of some migrants. They play a significant role in migrating people from their place of origin to the Arab countries by creating desires and instilling dreams of good futures in the minds of the destitute if they migrate.

Most of the study participants described how the false promises by the *dalalas* lured them to migrate 'illegally'. Several study participants described the false promises of the *dalalas* as quoted below.

The miserable life I was leading for a long time and the information I got from the dalalas made me so eager, and I immediately decided to go to Saudi Arabia. They presented the country as heaven on earth to me. They deceived me by listing many things. They told me that there were plenty of life-changing employment opportunities in Saudi Arabia. In their eloquent speech, they expressed that most of the jobs in Saudi Arabia are simple and undertaken by using less human energy consuming technologies. They did not need a high level of education or skills training, they told me. They also deceived me by saying that many people with low or no education had migrated, got highly paid jobs and become rich within a short period. They added that they had a lot of experience of helping their clients to become successful; I just had to leave everything to them and be confident in their service. According to their false information, many of the clients they already sent abroad achieved their goals very soon and have been thanking them. Therefore, the only thing expected from me was just to pay the service charge they required to facilitate an easy and safe journey for me. Even if I had no money on hand for the service charge, I should not bother because they would cover it for me and I could pay them back after I reached Saudi Arabia and got employment. When I heard all these things, I trusted them and was so excited -as if I had won a lottery - and decided to migrate (Zubeda, female, 25 years).

Fatuma also tells how illegal brokers came into her community to deceive and recruit people:

There were a number of illegal brokers campaigning throughout the community and were knocking at each door to attract and recruit potential job seekers. The community did not know who such people were and whether the information they were giving people was true or not. Everybody was spending his/her money without any guarantee for his/her life and with simple trust alone. The brokers deceived people and took large amounts of money from them by cheating and with false promises of a better life waiting for them abroad and were receiving large amounts of money. Individuals, families or relatives were paying 10,000-15,000 Ethiopian Birr or sometimes more, for a single broker who had promised to facilitate safe arrival and an employment opportunity for the emigrant. Most of our communities are trusting people and

the illegal brokers, smugglers and traffickers used the trust as an advantage to exploit everybody. I too was deceived and gave them 11,000 Ethiopian Birr for which I benefited nothing at the end (Fatuma, female 27 years).

Fedila described how a broker forced her into debt bondage as:

The local broker recruited from Omo Nada district, Asandabo. I migrated to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia through Dire Dawa crossing the border of Djibouti, Yemen and finally reaching Saudi Arabia illegally. I started the journey with my friends. I paid 6000 ETB for the local brokers who cheated me with false promises of an excellent opportunity I would enjoy in Saudi Arabia. The payment for the brokers in Yemen was not included in the initial payment as they told me that the sponsor or my employer in Jeddah would cover it. When I reached Yemen, my potential employer in Jeddah paid a sum of 5000 Riyal to the Yemen smugglers for a service fee and facilitation of my journey to Jeddah. After my arrival, the person employed me with 1800 Riyal per month for my services, but I did not receive anything for three months, as I had to pay to the debt to the employer (Fedila, female, 35 years).

Brokers, smugglers and traffickers network extended from the local community to various destination points involved in the recruitment, transportation and passing of people from different parts of Ethiopia to other destinations, particularly the Middle East (US Department of State, 2015). Once migrants have been recruited locally, they are handed over to the smuggling networks at different transit points in Somalia, Djibouti and Yemen until they reach the place of destination mainly Saudi Arabia (ILO, 2011). Yahaya describes the extensive smuggling network involved in getting migrants to Saudi Arabia and the costs involved as:

The local brokers informed me that they would facilitate everything for me to reach Saudi Arabia safely through their networks at different places and get employment. They took my friends and me from Omo Nada, our place of origin, and transferred me to Addis Ababa. Those in Addis Ababa submitted all of us to those smugglers and traffickers in Dire Dawa. Those in Dire Dawa, transferred us to those in Djibouti. Those in Djibouti then transferred us to those in Yemen and we finally reached Saudi Arabia. We paid them a lot of

money at all those transit points we passed. I myself paid them 6000 ETB until I reached Djibouti and in the end I left empty hand (Yahaya, male, 24 years).

In both male and female FGDs, the influence of local brokers (*dalalas*), smugglers and traffickers is also repeatedly mentioned as contributing to the widespread occurrence of illegal migration in the Omo Nada district. These agents have networks extended from the local area to the place of destination. Their major role is motivating potential migrants mainly by deceiving them with false information such the availability of employment opportunities and better pay in Arab countries. Available research evidence also confirms this finding. For instance, Asefach (2017) noted that the search for job opportunities, limited income and false promises made by brokers are the major factor drawing migrants into illegal migration (Asefach, 2017). The migration of Ethiopians to Arab countries has intensified due to social networks and expansion of illegal agencies (Girmachew, 2017).

Similarly, the key informant from Omo Nada Police Office emphasized that the *dalalas*/smugglers in local area also engage in recruiting the potential migrants and transfer to those in Addis Ababa in secret ways. Those in Addis Ababa transfer the migrants to those in Diredawa or in Jijiga. Those in Dire Dawa and Jijiga also transfer the migrants to those in Djibouti and Bosassu. From Djibouti and Bosassu, they pass the migrants mainly to Saudi Arabia via Yemen.

3.1.4 FAMILY PRESSURE

Families, themselves frustrated by poverty and their dire lives, were also instrumental in motivating family members to migrate through whatever means available in expectation of economic rewards from the remittances the migrant family members send back. Migration of family members to Arab countries by whichever means possible has become a poverty alleviating strategy for many families who have no assets or resources. Yahaya explains how he felt obliged to migrate to help his family in return for their investment in his childhood:

My family faced many ups and down in bringing up my siblings and I. In spite of their poverty, they did everything they could to raise me well. In our community, family expect children to do something when they grow up in return for their family's investment at childhood. I had a social responsibility to help my family. As I am the senior child in my family, my family expect many

things from me. I had to be an example to the rest of my siblings in supporting my family. For that reason, I had to try everything I could to help them, as they had done for me when I was a child. However, I did not have a job to do so as I had no mechanism to get an income and help my family; I migrated to Saudi Arabia illegally as many youths in our community had been doing to help their families (Yahaya, male, 24 years).

Fatuma explains how her parents themselves made the arrangements with the *dalalas*, paid for the so-called facilitation services and sent her abroad like this.

Disappointed with poverty, the difficulties in improving our situation, and attracted by the success stories of a few people they had heard from the dalalas, my father and mother encouraged me to migrate and help them as many youths in the community were doing. They consulted with me after they communicated and made all the arrangements with the dalalas. They told me after they paid the service charge for the dalalas and made an appointment to fix the date for the journey. They only told me that I had to go to Saudi Arabia after they had almost finished everything. I agreed with their ideas as I had no other choice and they did the arrangement for my future benefits. I preferred migration because I could work and improve my life and that of my family's instead of suffering here with poverty throughout my life (Fatuma, female, 27 years).

Both FGD participants also confirmed that it has become the norm among families in the community to send their children to Arab countries to get work. Families put pressure on their children to migrate through whatever means available, including illegal migration. Families view having at least one child working in an Arab country as having money in the bank because of the hope that their children abroad will send the money that will improve their situation and their future. Having a child abroad has also become a mark of social respect for some families. The community also gives more respect for those who have a child/children abroad than the family who has sent only one or no child at all yet. A family who has two or more children, particularly in Saudi Arabia is viewed as role models in the community for sending their children to another country where they get better jobs and income. Sending children to abroad through migration has thus become a source of income, social status and prestige amongst many families in the community. It is also a symbol of achievement, which

makes the family feel proud and hopeful as understood from the FGD participants. Consequently, every family has been making efforts to send its daughters/sons to Saudi Arabia.

The key informant from the Labour and Social Affairs department of the district added that sending children to Saudi Arabia has currently become more valued than sending them to universities. This is due to fact that many families think that even with a university degree it is difficult to get employment in the country.

This implies that the decision to migrate in general and irregular migration in particular is not only made by the individual migrants alone but also their families initiate it. That means the migration decisions has an intrafamilial implicit contract in its nature. The family supports the migrants before leaving home in expectation of remittances as compensation (Lucas & Stark 1988).

3.1.5 SOCIO-CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS REASONS

It would appear from some of the responses of the study participants that illegal migration has become a cultural norm in the community. People not only migrate for economic reasons alone, but also do it to achieve social-cultural and religious ends. The attraction to Arab countries by people of the Islamic faith to learn religious values and ideologies are other factors that have contributed to the illegal migration of people from the study area as is evident from the following response: The following narrations are evidences concerning this issue.

I had the desire to go to Saudi Arabia for a religious purpose. Saudi Arabia is a holy place where almost all Muslims in the world wish to go at least once in their lives. The same was true for me. I had a desire to go to Saudi Arabia to be a strong person in my faith. It was my desire to learn the holy Quran in detail and become an intellectual religious teacher and preacher of Islam. Truly speaking, I had a desire to go there for religious purposes rather than for work because I know that I can work and change myself here in my country if I was determined to do so. I tried by rearing goats and realized this. My goats reproduced and tripled in number within a year and I started to get adequate income to feed my family. Soon after my goat rearing business started to be fruitful, however, I encountered a problem. The problem was that

my wife became sick and had to drop out of second year college training. While I was at hospital to treat my wife, thieves stole fifteen goats from me. When my wife became better, I decided to migrate because I was angry because my goats were stolen, and I was left with nothing. I became poor and lacked any thing to feed my wife and children. Hence, I changed my plan to work in my country and decided to go to Saudi Arabia to attend religious studies as well as to work and change my life (Bilal, male, 32 years).

Similar to Bilal, Sheki had migrated to Saudi Arabia where he had hoped to learn more about his religion and become a religious teacher. His long-held desire visit Saudi Arabia for religious education and financial security were the reasons for his illegal migration to Saudi Arabia as he described below.

I had a long-held plan to go to Saudi Arabia for religious purposes. I wanted to learn the holy Quran in detail and become a knowledgeable Islam religion teacher. Saudi Arabia is the origin of the Islam religion. There are many Islamic religious intellectuals there. I also had ambition to visit the two holy places, Mecca and Medina, in Saudi Arabia for praying and praising Allah at least once in my life as other Muslims do. The country became an ideal place for me for all these reasons. It was possible to go Saudi Arabia legally for religious purpose. However, I decided to migrate on foot illegally as I could not afford the high cost of transportation via the legal means (Sheki, male 49 years old).

The information obtained from both FGD participants and key informants further strengthens the arguments of the returnees to the study area. According to information from the key informant interview with the Omo Nada Labour and Social Affairs expert, the young generation grew up by hearing about the golden opportunities in Arab countries and the successful stories of relatives and neighbours who had been to Arab countries. Children are brought up listening and internalizing the economic and religious importance of going to Saudi Arabia in particular and the opportunities available in Arab countries in general. They consider migration to Saudi Arabia as a normal part of their lives, which a Muslim should at least perform once in life. Many people believe that visiting and praying at Mecca and Medina is one of the religious duties by which the individual gets forgiveness for his sins from the creator, Allah. Because of this, they have been migrating to these places through any

available means. Those who cannot travel legally due to lack of money usually migrate illegally according to the key informant.

Similarly, both FGD participants mentioned that those who travelled to Mecca receive great spiritual grace according to the teachings of Islam religion. Travelling to Mecca is one of the pilgrimages of the Islamic religion. It is a symbol of obedience to Allah. It is also a way of getting forgiveness for our sins and attracting blessings that eradicate all our problems including sickness and poverty. Due to these reasons, a Muslim is required to travel to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. However, according to the FGD participants, today many people have been migrating mainly to get employment, better income and overcome poverty other than for religious purposes.

3.1.6 ABSENCE OF LEGAL MEANS TO MIGRATE TO SAUDI ARABIA

Some of the study participants highlighted the lack of legal means for males to migrate to Saudi Arabia for employment as the policy of the country was closed to unskilled foreign male job seekers. Saudi Arabian policy only allows female foreigners to migrate and obtain employment in the country in areas of household domestic activities. Despite the legal means for them, the women study participants, however, argued that the long time taken to process legal migration, its relatively high cost and inability to get a sponsor in Saudi Arabia are the major reasons for women to migrate illegally. Many participants express these issues as impediments to legal migration.

“Even if there was legal means, it took me a long time to process it and required more expense. That was the reason I preferred the illegal means” (Zubeda, female, 25 years old). “Yes, I know that many women had been migrating legally. But I could not try the legal migration because I was poor and had no money to process all the procedures the legal means require such as the medical check-up, passport, flight fare and others. I decided to migrate illegally because of those reasons” (Fedila, female, 35 years old). “Of course, there was a legal means. But it was costly as one had to pay for everything including flight cost. I could not afford all those costs. That was why I consulted the brokers and chose the illegal ones” (Mishel, female, 27 years old).

There were no legal means. For instance, there was no legal agency in Ethiopia, which linked male job seekers in Ethiopia with employers in Saudi Arabia. As the policy of Saudi Arabia has no room for male job seekers to emigrate and get employment opportunities there, the employee-employer legal agencies do not

process legal migration for males to the country. That was why I decided to migrate illegally. I would have migrated legally, if there had been a legal way (Mensur, male, 32 years).

Had it been I got the legal means, I would have been flown through Bole International Airport, which saved myself from the exhaustive journey on foot, the maltreatment and economic exploitation in the hands of smugglers and traffickers at every transit point. But there was no legal means for the male Ethiopian job seekers to migrate to Saudi Arabia for employment. I migrated illegally because of that (Seifu, male 25 years old).

While inability to afford the cost of legal migration was the main reason for the females to choose illegal migration, the absence of legal means to migrate was the main reason for some males to migrate illegally. Both FGD participants also stressed that lack of legal means was the reason for many males to migrate illegally from their community to Saudi Arabia.

4. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the various contextual factors discussed above and the subjective experiences of the returnees resulted in their ‘illegal migrations’. Poverty, unemployment, influence of brokers/smugglers/traffickers, family pressure, religious and absence of legal means particularly for males are the major complex and reinforcing factors that gave rise to the illegal migration of the study participants. The returnees’ subjective experiences of these factors and the meaning they gave to migration such as “means to escape poverty, alternative way to success and a key to unlock poverty” also motivated them to migrate.

These imply a number of personal and contextual factors ranging from micro to macro level contributed to the illegal migration of the returnees to Saudi Arabia. Lack of skills and knowledge to get employment opportunities within their community and the corresponding disappointment, frustration and hopelessness resulting from joblessness as well as the desire to live a better life in future were the micro level factors that forced the people to migrate illegally.

The motivation and influence of families in expectation of support from their young family members to improve their destitute situations and the inability to provide financial support for these young unemployed family members were the meso level factors responsible for the illegal migration of the returnees. Information about the success stories of people who already

migrated to Saudi Arabia and the deception of brokers, smugglers and traffickers also influenced the returnees to make the decision to migrate illegally.

Moreover, poverty, the limited capacity of the existing employment market, political and religious reasons were the macro level factors that contributed to the returnees' movement from their place of origin to Saudi Arabia.

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