

## **GENDER, DEVELOPMENT AND MIGRATION LINKAGES IN ETHIOPIA: AN OVERVIEW**

**Alebachew Adem\***

### **INTRODUCTION**

There is a two-way relationship between migration and development. Migration affects development and development in turn influences migration. Regardless of how one views this relationship, migration has provided an integral linkage between the demographic process and the process of socio-economic development. It is primarily because of this linkage that migration has received tremendous attention in recent decades. Studies have investigated different forms, sources, destinations and determinants of migration. However, until recently, the study of gender, development and migration linkage has received relatively little attention among social researchers. Migration research like much of social research is beginning to redress a severe imbalance on the gender bias.

Given the importance of female migration in Ethiopia, the study of gender, development and migration deserves emphasis in order to promote the understanding of the process and thereby assist in the formulation of gender conscious and all participatory urban and rural development strategies and policies.

Understanding the living and working conditions of rural women and their socio-economic status - the causes, thought processes and the effects of female urban-ward migrations - and the identification of the major problems and constraints of women migrations in the urban areas will provide important information on ways and means of tackling these problems - abolishing existing customs and practices which aggregate discrimination against these women - and facilitating conditions conducive to their

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\* Senior Lecturer, Department of Geography, Dilla College of Teacher Education and Health Sciences, Debu University.

participation in the fields of development activity and enjoy the benefits thereof on equal basis with men.

## **THE SITUATION OF RURAL WOMEN AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA**

In the contemporary developing societies the width and breadth of human problems have become deeper. Issues like gender-and-development, gender inequalities, marginality, underdevelopment and unemployment, and respect for human rights are coming to be the major concerns of policy-makers, administrators, development researchers and the society at large. Such kinds of problems that directly and indirectly affect the daily lives of every human being necessitate the intervention of all parties in designing and implementing policies for they are either beneficiaries or victims of policies and practices.

Gender is a socio-cultural and crosscutting issue that must be considered in all plans for development, because in many societies' access to and control over resources and property is determined by gender. Development issues are, in turn, essential demographic issues because, to paraphrase Mark, population is the basis as well as the subject of development. Thus, a basic pre-requisite for development becomes the recognition of the role of women in all aspects of the development.

The role of women and their contribution in Ethiopia is critical to sustainable development. As producers and environmental managers, women play a vital role in agricultural production and income generation in rural areas. In the urban areas they are the great invisible workforce and industrial entrepreneurs whose labor finds no place in national economic statistics because it is unpaid or underpaid (World Bank, 1992; UNICEF, 1995).

### **The Concept of Division of Labor by Sex**

Gender-role differentiation produces a sexual division of labor in the family as well as in the informal and formal labor markets. While every society practices a division of labour by gender there are considerable cross-cultural and regional variations, so that what is considered to be proper work for women in one society or region may be typical men's work in another. Both men and women are conditioned from early on to have different functions, capabilities, and aspirations. For women in most societies, these functions include not only looking after the home and the family, but also the more general caring, counseling, and nurturing functions extending into neighborhood and community.

It appears to be deeply embedded in social traditions and customs that the division of work between men and women within the family is complementary rather than competitive, and that father and mother serve as role-models for sons and daughters respectively, thus perpetuating a pattern of role differentiation from generation to generation. Although there is no reason why the culturally assigned domestic functions of women could not be assumed just as well by men, there are apparently no societies in which men have totally replaced women in these functions (WHO, 1987; UN, 1993). The pattern of complementarity is replicated in labor markets in the form of gender-typing of job and the development of non-competing worker groups. A further differentiation between the sexes within families is the assignment of subordinate roles to women and dominant, socially valued, highly esteemed and more rewarding roles to men, and this pattern too is frequently found in labor markets both formal and informal.

One additional aspect of gender role differentiation is the distinction between market and extra market functions and the relegation of men primarily to the former and women primarily to the latter. This form of specialization has often made women economically dependent on husbands and/also has led to a general lack of reorganization and under valuation of household related work. However, specialization in the production of goods and services for the family's own consumption (extra-market work) has not necessarily precluded the production by women working at home of such

goods as food, clothing, pottery and handicrafts for sale on the market. Nor has it always prohibited women from working for pay outside the home.

### **Economic Roles of Rural Women in Ethiopia and Their Constraints**

Ethiopian women are actively involved in all aspects of their society's life. The fact that women are both producers and procreators, as well as active participants in the socio-economic, environmental, political and cultural activities of their communities has enabled them to play an all round role.

As producers and environmental managers, women play a pivotal role in agricultural production in rural Ethiopia. Although the major tendency is viewing the role of women in nutrition, trade and agriculture as being limited to cooking and serving in most developing countries, they do the major part of the farming as well. "In the developing world generally, rural women account for at least 50 percent of food production" (WHO 1987:17). In Africa, some 75 percent of all agricultural labor (including farm or field and non-farm work) is performed by women (Ibid; see also Senanayake, 1995). In Ethiopia, the overwhelming majority of the female population in the rural areas is directly engaged in agricultural production. Rural women in Ethiopia are actively engaged in farm work such as in the preparation of the ground, sowing, weeding, pest control, harvesting, and associated operations. Non-farm work which is not viewed in economic terms, as essential to daily subsistence (even though families could not survive with out the benefits deriving from such work), is also essentially performed by these rural women.

Rural women in Ethiopia, apart from their active participation in supply of safe water, basic sanitation, management of illness, environmental management including soil conservation and afforestation programmes, and the preparation of food for home consumption, are engaged in the trade of both processed and unprocessed agricultural commodities (both food and fiber) in order to produce some cash for the innumerable demands on, and needs of, a family, e.g., taxes, school fees, clothing, food in times of shortage, and other basic needs. In addition to the above-mentioned activities, essential for the survival of the family (and community at large),

many women in rural Ethiopia also play a far greater role in the delivery of health care (Mekonnen, 1991; Adanech and Azeb, 1991). As mothers, grandmothers, wives, daughters and neighbors, they are the principal providers of informal health care in families and communities. By serving as positive role-models and by encouraging family members to assume greater responsibility for their own health, women can help to effect behavioral changes (within the family and in the community) that may lead to a reduction in the risk of accidents, disease, mental illness, and early death (WHO, 1987).

However, in Ethiopia, particularly in rural Ethiopia, social and economic discrimination are the most formidable obstacles to women's participation in the development process. The institutions of society and of the economy attach primary of place to men, while women are generally and wrongly regarded as unproductive of anything except children and domestic chattels (Alebachew, 2000; Helen, 1992; Baker, 1995).

Notwithstanding the increasing responsibility for agricultural production and income generations, women have least access to and control over resources, and receive the lowest wages and are the least educated and trained (Seyoum, 1991; Dessalegn, 1991; Helen, 1992; Clapham, 1988). The discriminatory institutional infrastructures and socio-cultural practices have barred rural women from enjoying the fruits of their labour and made them to lay behind men (who are considered, irrationally, to be the bread winners) in all fields of self-advancement.

As a result of their poverty, stress and oppression and lacking alternatives, rural women are more often compelled to move out of their home villages and settle in another location. Being forced to flee from intolerable and inhospitable environments from which a livelihood can no longer be produced, the majority of these women, in the destination areas, are engaged in all kinds of "survival occupations" and odd jobs, which carry considerable occupational risk (Mesfin, 1970; Lakech, 1974, 1978; Alebachew, 1999, 2000). As a result, poverty among females is more intractable than among males, and their health more vulnerable to biological

and general health hazards and adverse change in social and economical conditions.

## **WOMEN AND MIGRATION IN (RURAL) ETHIOPIA**

As the major part of the article, this section is organized along two main lines: the causes and determinants of female migration, and the role of migration and its impact on individual female migrants and their home households.

### **Many Roads lead Women to Town in Ethiopia**

Migration represents one important demographic response to conditions of poverty, environmental stress and outmoded and unfavorable cultural beliefs and practices in most parts of rural Ethiopia (see Alebachew, 1999, 2000; Yewalashet, 2002; Semunigus, 2002; Mesfin 1968; 1970). The large migratory flows of rural women from poverty stricken and environmentally degraded rural areas to the urban areas are rather well documented and understood (Alula, 1995; Mesfin, 1968; Helen, 1992; Alebachew; 1999, 2000).

The selectivity of rural-urban migration in terms of sex (favoring females) was established as a law of internal migration (Ravenstein, 1885, 1889, Cited in Lee, 1966). Some studies have provided empirical evidence supporting this assertion; others have questioned its validity, and yet others have attempted to establish patterns for different continents-women predominate in the migration flows of Latin America, while men are predominant in Asia and Africa (Elizage, 1972; Browning, 1971; Gilbert and Gugler, 1994).

It has been traditionally said that males predominate in Africa Rural-Urban migration. It is asserted that in capital cities and major urban centers "which owe their origin and /or growth to the impact of the colonial administration, the employment structure and requirements in the modern sector tend to restrict the participation of women in paid employment" (Adepoju, 1978: 12). However, the prospects for female self-employment in commerce, trade and services in both old and new towns of West Africa have produced a

more balanced sex ratio among migrants (Little, 1974). Moreover, in many streams of city-ward migrants in Africa, the number of female migrants has been increasing as women were seeking (in the expectation of greater autonomy) to escape the oppression of male control, where runaway girls fled unwanted prospective husbands, and runaway wives fled violent or miserly husbands or the quarrels and competitiveness of polygamy (Wright, 1995; Alebachew, 2000).

Until recently, women are usually stereotyped as associational migrants. It is only in their capacity as dependents of male migrants, and "The independents rural-urban migration of women has been grossly neglected in African studies to date" (Gugler and Ludwar -Ene, 1995: 265). However, recent studies in many parts of Africa including Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Kenya have shown that autonomous female migration is directed towards attaining economic independence through self employment or wage income (Adepoju, 1995; Olurode, 1995; Helen, 1991; Alebachew, 2000).

Contrary to what has been observed in most African and Asian countries, migration to urban areas of Ethiopia is female selective. Low sex ratio of migrants to the major towns in the country is almost the rule (CSO, 1980; OPHCC, 1998; Alula, 1995; Hailu, 1983; Alebachew, 1999, 2000). The eroding status of women in the rural areas, owing to their limited access to property rights, male veto power over their decisions, harmful socio-cultural practices and constraints and a general state of dissatisfaction resulting from poverty, stress and oppression were the major factors of urban-ward migration for females in Ethiopia. (Alebachew, 1999, 2000; Baker, 1995; Clapham, 1988; Lakech, 1978).

The deteriorating living and working conditions of women in the rural areas including their limited access to land, the instability of marriage which frequently results in divorce, widowhood, quarrels with husbands and/or family members, early marriage practices, and the perceived role of women (almost exclusively as domestic chattels and as a means of procreation and other socio-cultural practices and constraints particularly in the rural areas), and marriage were the major factors of urban-ward migration for most

females in Ethiopia (Alebachew, 2000, 2002; Abdurahman, 1987; Hailu, 1983; Baker 1995).

According to Alebachew (2000, 2002) three categories of women moving to urban areas independently may be distinguished; young, unmarried rural women who typically work at first as domestics; educated, young, unmarried women in search of wage employment; and separated, divorced and widowed women whose position is precarious in patrilocal communities.

In her study of "Gender, Development and identity" in Ethiopia, Helen (1992) also provides an account of high marital instability in the northern parts of Ethiopia. She suggested that the high divorce rates in the region reflect both women's power to exit from a relationship in search of a better one, and their dissatisfaction resulting from poverty and oppression. The divorcees with few resources are most likely to migrate to urban areas. Given very limited rural employment opportunities, urban areas offer much better options (See also Hailu, 1983; Baker, 1995; Alebachew, 2000; Woube and Sjoberg, 1999).

The uneven and unequal growth of the economy between rural and urban areas and within regions in Ethiopia has led to distinct social and economic differentiation between the towns and the countryside. Small towns and rural settlements are special entities located at lower points of advantages, benefits, services, and opportunities. While the major cities, including regional capitals and particularly Addis Ababa, the federal capital, are the most favored in terms of the concentration of economic, administrative and cultural activities and basic services and infrastructures. As a result, urbanward migration of females apparently shows little sign of abating. A study of the causes and effects of female migration, and rural-urban linkages in southern Ethiopia (by Alebachew, 2002) have shown that out of the total surveyed 300 women migrants in the four major urban centers of the SNNPR (i.e Awassa, Dilla, Yirgalem, and Yirgacheffie), about 30.2 percent of the rural origin female migrants as compared to 12.5 percent of the urban origin migrants reported that they came to the study towns to free themselves from traditional (cultural and family) obligations, practices, and



restrictions (such as divorce, widowhood, unwanted and / or unsatisfactory marriage, etc).

The preponderance of migrants from rural areas (as compared to the urban origin female in-migrants) who migrated for cultural reasons strongly suggests (as is the case) the prevalence of conservative and sometimes obsolete traditional practices (norms) in the rural than the urban areas. Such practices as early marriage, childlessness divorce and widowhood, which usually result in cultural limitations for remarriage significantly contribute to out-migration from the rural areas, particularly among the young female group. Conflict with husbands for those who were married and with families for unmarried young girls, pregnancy before marriage, all unacceptable in many parts of the country, are all important components of socio-cultural factors of migration for most women.

### **Female Migration and the Urban Labor Market**

The debate concerning the implication of the migration process on urban labour markets of less developed countries is unresolved. Some scholars (Berkoh, 1974; Safa, 1976; Racyznski; 1972) contended that those who migrated from the countryside to the city did not become fully integrated into urban life but rather held only service jobs with very low incomes or remained unemployed for periods of varying length than non-migrants.

On the other hand, some argue that, other things being equal, migrants are more likely to participate in the urban labor market to a greater extent than non-migrants (Herrick 1965; Standing, 1978; Fleurent, 1990; Oberai, 1984).

In general, the effects of migration on individual migrants depend on their demographic (age, sex, marital status, family size) and socio-economic (education, work experience and skills, place of origin) characteristics.

### **Problems Female Migrants Encounter in Urban Areas**

A constant and intense migration to a city may contribute to the maintenance of sectors of unemployed and of self employed workers, whether or not the migrants find themselves in these sectors. The

discrimination against migrants in their search for work because of their demographic, tribal, ethnic, religious, and cultural differences and their lack of contacts may reduce their chances of finding employment (Oberai & Bilsborrow, 1984).

Several studies in Ethiopia (Mesfin, 1972; Lakech, 1978; Teklemariam, 1976) have indicated that migrant women in the town find employment in informal service sectors, and less commonly in small businesses. Most of them earn their livelihood either as prostitutes, or as petty-traders, baby-sisters, house servants and the like. According to Alebachew (1999,2000) and Teklemariam (1976), prostitution, which is caused by socio-cultural factors including divorce, early marriage, migration, has become a survival mechanism because of economic deprivation and lack of employment opportunities due to lack of training and marketable skills.

A number of studies allow us to delineate three categories of rural women who move on their own (see Alebachew, 2000). In many rural areas, substantial numbers of young, unmarried women with no or little formal education and training come to town. The majority are between the ages of 12-20 when arriving. While in town, they usually stay first with friends, families and other co-villagers who themselves are migrants of an earlier time. These women typically work at first as domestic help.

Widowed, divorced or separated women constitute a second category of women who move from the countryside to the city on their own. One study of the causes and determinants of migration to Addis Ababa (by Alebachew, 2000: 58-60) has shown that about 45 and 11.5 percent of the rural origin (as compared to 28 and 6.5 percent of the urban origin) female migrants were divorcees and widowed, respectively. The preponderance of such divorced or widowed women in the migration stream points to the fact that such women have frequently been in a weak social and economic position and they have lower probability to remarry or stay as a divorcee or widower in the home villages. Moreover, the dissolution of marriage by either means implies the loss of one of the breadwinners and the wife is obliged to work hard at least to ensure the living of the family. However, the poor living and working conditions in the rural areas will give no hope in the villages. Thus,

as Mesfin (1972; 191) and Baker (1995) have indicated it cultural, physical, and capital constraints bar women from having access to gainful employments. Being increasingly disenchanting and bored with rural life, young divorcees and widows move to the towns. Given very limited employment opportunities and intolerable living conditions, urban areas offer much better options.

Often young women who have obtained some education are also dissatisfied with the lack of opportunities and the prospects that marriage in the rural community offers. Such women constitute the third category. These women run away from their relatives, friends, husbands, and kin and move to the towns where they can hide themselves, free from a violent or miserly husband and other traditional constraints and earn a living.

In addition to low incomes and degrading work conditions and limited life opportunity for upward socio-economic mobility, a wide range of socio-economic and psychological adjustment problems, including cultural variations, unpleasant and irritating living and working environments, poor health and mental stress have been identified with rural-urban migration of young rural females (Andargachew, 1989; Semunigus, 2002; Yewalashet 2002, Alebachew, 2000).

### **Achievements of Female In-migrants in Urban Areas**

It has been argued (and proved) that the migration of women to become domestic servants or pettytraders in the towns contributes to increase the level of female labour-force participation in urban areas not only directly but also indirectly by freeing women to participate in activities outside the home, (Garcia et. al, 1981; Adepoju, 1995). However, the condition of unskilled migrant female workers hardly contributes to raise the social status of these women, especially if they are associational (dependent) migrants or are urged to migrant by their husband's families or other kinfolks, as is the case in Mexico city (Arizpe, 1981).

A comparative analysis of pre-and post-migration situation of migrants in Addis Ababa indicated that most of the migrant female households have shown significant improvement in their living and working conditions and of some of their dependents also (Alebachew, 2000, 2002). He argued that some women have improved their occupational, income, health and educational status as a result of migration despite high and rising levels of urban unemployment and poor working conditions. He found that few women moved from survival and traditional type of occupations (such as petty or "guilt" trading, street vending, prostitution house-servants) into clerical and skilled occupations like in hotels, pastry houses, barbary houses and factories. However, it can be argued here that it is not urban-ward migration as such that leads to a change in women's status but rather their demographic (age, marital status, family sizes) and socio-economic (migration and work experiences, education, skill and training, employment, place of origin) characteristics which determine their employment and socio-economic status.

### **FEMALE MIGRATION AND RURAL-URBAN SOCIO-ECONOMIC LINKAGES**

In Ethiopia, as elsewhere in Africa and other developing countries, migrants maintain strong links with their home communities. Such ties are expressed in both economic and non-economic terms. Migrants are usually beholden (feel compelled) to visit home periodically, provide a social matrix for new comers from the home place and send cash and other consumer items to families and other kinfolds. The extent, frequency, and importance of such ties, however, vary considerably, depending on socio-economic status, occupation, distance, income and the nature of social networks.

Rural-urban migration can forge strong links between the rural and the urban areas. The very few available studies on circular migration and the role of migrants in their communities of origin have reflected the importance of the participation of migrants in home-village based local community development activities (Worku, 1995; Getenet, 1994; Fecadu, 1972; Burley, 1979).

In their respective studies on Gurage urban migration, Worku (1995) and Getnet (1994) have also found some beneficial consequences of migration in the home villages. As a result of century-old migratory experience, there has been a net transfer of money and household utensils from the towns and change of traditional perceptions, beliefs and practices in the home community. The flow of capital back home is also observed in the remarkable performance registered in the road building in the migrants' homeland. Both the Alemgane Wolayita Road construction and the Gurage Road construction were initiated, organized and led by the urban Gurage migrants who also covered the lions share of the bill (Getenet, citing Fekadu, 1972).

The evidence from Addis Ababa (Alebachew, 2000) also suggests that both women and men migrants in general maintain social and economic links with relations and kin elsewhere through the exchange of periodic visits and contacts, letters and other relevant information, cash and commodities. These migrants not only maintain ties with family at home, but also with the home community itself by participating in home-town based associations and local community development organizations. This is also the case in other parts of Africa, for example, in Nigeria (Trager, 1995; Jones-Dube, 1995), in Mali (Vaa et al, 1989, Cited in Trager, 1995), and in Zimbabwe, (Schyster, 1990 cited in Wright, 1995) women migrants actively participate in local- community development activities in their home areas.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Migration has been one of the population topics that has received little attention among social researchers and development planners. This is particularly the case in Ethiopia where data on internal migration and female migration in particular are very scanty, and analysis less complete than for other demographic data. Given this fact and the importance of female migration in the country, the study of gender, development and migration linkages such as this will definitely promote the understanding of the process and thereby assist in the formulation of gender conscious and all participatory urban and rural development strategies and policies.

Gender roles are influenced by economic, social, political, and demographic factors including migration patterns. These determinants are important because they shape the scope of people's activities, their access to and control over resources, and the decisions they make about different matters. They are also important because, unlike reproductive roles, they can be altered.

Ethiopian women are actively involved in all aspects of their society's life. The fact that women are both producers and procreators, as well as active participants in the socio-economic, political, environmental and cultural activities of their communities has enabled them to play an all round role. However, the discriminatory institutional infrastructures and socio-cultural practices and perceptions (which are heavily weighted against women) have barred women from enjoying the fruits of their labour and made them to lay behind men in all fields of self-advancement.

In many parts of rural Ethiopia many young rural women are forced to flee from intolerable and inhospitable environments from which a livelihood can no longer be produced. As a result of the deteriorating living and working conditions of women in the rural areas, including their limited access to land and other assets, stress, poverty, oppression, the instability of marriage, early and unwanted marriage practices, rape and the perceived role of women almost exclusively as domestic chattels and as a means of procreation and lacking alternatives, rural women are more often compelled to move out of their home villages and settle in another location. In their new circumstances, they find the lowest paid 'elementary' jobs and survival types of traditional jobs, which carry considerable occupational risk. Their employment status also declines more rapidly than that of men. As a result, poverty among female migrants is more intractable than among male migrants, and their health more vulnerable to biological and general health hazards and adverse changes in social and economic conditions.

In spite of the various difficulties and risks they could face in the destinations, most urban migrant women, individually or family and household wise are better off in the towns than in the home villages (if migration had not taken place). Such migration has also helped rural women

to hide themselves, free from traditional restrictions, and earn a living. This however did not imply that all female migrants have such a success story. There are rural women in the towns who are unable to get access to any kind of income and employment and hence such women resort to prostitution, begging, scavenging (those hanging on the elites and/or depend on the left-over-trade, jobs, objects, spaces of the town), property crimes, gambling, and other social ills and evil activities.

The role of women in Ethiopia is critical to sustainable development. The eradication of poverty is a reachable goal. A basic prerequisite is the recognition of the role of women in all aspects of development. Scholars often recommend empowering women and the poor as a way out of the soul-destroying impacts of poverty. And in a multiethnic and multilingual society like Ethiopia, a better understanding of the development process will be ensured when women and gender issues are treated with the highest priority.

Programmes of social action that ignore the situation of rural women and their contribution to the development process are doomed to failure. Schemes for rural development that help to empower rural women, improve their living and working conditions (socio-economic status) in their home areas and to bring them together to pool and rationalize certain components of their work are most likely to be useful. In any event, plans for rural development have little chance of success where women are excluded in the planning process.

From the point of view of women and development, women should gain greater control over their reproductive lives and participate fully in socio-economic and political activities. Harmful traditional practices and perceptions and all types of gender biases, whether in the areas of administration, in the provision of economic resources and services need to be removed in a methodical way, and addressed through multi-disciplinary approach. Ensuring a complete empowerment of rural women especially to enable their full participation in resource ownership and management, in population and household decision making is needed. The promotion of off-farm, on-farm and non-farm income generating programmes which aim at

the alleviation of poverty especially among women whether they have access to land or not is needed.

Finally, failure to reduce women's workload has had disastrous effects on the health of women and in turn on the capacity of women for work. Unless it is broken, this vicious circle bodes "ill for all" rather than "health for all". It is hoped that development planners, decision makers, whether in regional or federal institutions, or else where, will begin to pay more than lip-service to the role and contribution of women in the reduction of poverty and the achievement of sustainable development.



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