

## Factors that Contribute to Illegal Migration in Kobo Woreda, North Wollo Zone, Ethiopia

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### Abstract

*This study was conducted on illegal migration in Kobo Woreda of the Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia. Data were collected using in-depth and key informant interviews. A total of 22 individuals (13 direct and 9 indirect) participated in the study. The direct participants were potential migrants whereas the indirect participants were parents/spouses of the potential migrants. Data revealed that the two major factors that contribute to illegal migration include push and pull factors, and failure in the process of legal migration. Some of the specific push factors include unemployment, not doing well in education, and insufficient farm land. Similarly the pull factors are attractive salary, freedom of movement and less work load in the destination countries. In conclusion, there is no knowledge gap among the participants that come from different social and demographic background concerning the risk of illegal migration. The study calls for further research, advocacy, policy discussion and curricula revision in the education system to include lessons on migration.*

**Keywords:** illegal migration, potential migrants, pushing and pulling factors, legal process

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## Introduction

Ethiopia is a part of the "cradle of civilization" and is one of the few countries which have never been colonized. Since the 1980s, the country has become one of the largest contributors to the refugee flows (Bariagaber, 1999). As a consequence, Ethiopia has become internationally known for its refugee crisis, including problems of managing refugee flows and the issue of repatriation.

The majority of the population (about 80%) in Ethiopia is involved in agriculture, which accounts for 46 % of the GDP (Financial Standards Forum, 2009). The increasing population puts further pressure on the land use, making attainment of self-sufficiency more challenging (Financial Standards Forum, 2009).

As a result of rapid population growth and other factors such as lack of job opportunity in the Country and the availability of better job opportunities elsewhere, Ethiopia has been known by many types of migrations over the years. The Country has been both an origin and a destination for either voluntary or involuntary migrants, and many migrants have also used it as a transit area. According to United Nations Higher Commission for Refugees report (2012), the illegal migration from Ethiopia is increasing. Illegal migration is migration to a foreign state without a legal permission of the state authorities (Kose, 2005). Illegal immigration can take many forms (forced migration, labour migration, etc.) and may have many different reasons (war, overpopulation, family reunification, and deprivation of citizenship). The people in this situation have the status of illegal aliens.

According to International Council on Human Rights Policy (2010), poverty and insecurity compel millions of people to consider leaving their homes. Mass communications make visible the wealth and opportunities that exist in other countries. Technologically, it is now much easier and faster for individuals to travel long distances in shorter time. Transnational networks facilitate this movement and advertise the opportunities available abroad. In addition, changing demographics create a need for migrant labours. Migration of people is categorized into two major movements - legal and illegal migrations.



Illegal migration is currently debated most heatedly among scholars and politicians across nations. It is an illegal form of migration, which occurs when people enter or reside in another country without having received legal authorization from the host state to do so. Illegal migration is a sensitive political and policy issue in all countries. Illegal migrants are frequently perceived as a threat, by governments which are reluctant to create legal channels for their entry, and by the general public which perceives that their presence contributes to insecurity or unemployment. For migrants themselves, illegal status simply increases their vulnerability to human rights abuses, discrimination, marginalization and exclusion (International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2010).

The largest migration flow worldwide is from developing to developed countries. For developed countries illegal migration, trafficking, managing immigration, circular migration flows, and return migration issues will be high on the political agenda. These migration flows pose challenges to the sending and receiving countries (Martin and Zurcher, 2008). Adepoju (2008: 57) states "Sub-Saharan Africa is facing daunting challenges in respect of increasing illegal migration, human trafficking and the emigration of skilled professionals."

There is an increased appreciation for the fact that well-managed migration benefits African countries and contributes to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) (Joint Africa-EU Declaration on Migration and Development, 2006). In particular, there is an overall increased recognition of migration as generating remittances and contributing to poverty reduction, as well as returned expatriates, who import vital skills positively contribute to development in their home countries. However, maximizing benefits and minimizing the negative impacts of migration require appropriate migration management frameworks and human capacities.

Low employment opportunities are likely to become one of the major drivers of migration in the future in Africa (Adepoju, 2008) in combination with Africa's relatively young population (Spaan and Van Moppes, 2006). These will continue to be the main factors in Ethiopia given the current urbanization trends and high levels of unemployment as well as young population composition (Financial Standards Forum, 2009).

According to Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2009), for Ethiopia in particular, human rights violations and conflict will continue to drive migration flows, both within and out of the country. In addition, the high poverty levels Ethiopia currently faces will drive people to look for better opportunities elsewhere. Urbanization will also pose challenges to the Country in the future and more Ethiopians will seek better opportunities in largest cities, which will contribute for high level of internal migration (Berhanu and White, 2000; Ezra and Kiros, 2001).

According to the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (2008), by the year 2020, it is anticipated that around 22 million Ethiopians will live in the cities. This might lead to increasing unemployment levels in the cities, which might, in turn, result in higher cross-border migration flows.

In the case of Ethiopian women who migrate to the Middle East countries, the initial migration decision is said to be made by their own free will. However, such a free will depends on misinformation provided regarding the position and circumstances waiting for them in the host country. The present number of trafficked women is unknown but it is estimated to be as large as 130,000 Ethiopian women and children live in the Gulf States. The top destination countries are Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates (International Organization for Migration, n.d).

According to the Danish Refugee Council and the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (2012), women have more opportunities to enter Yemen regularly through the airport. On the other hand, the majority of Ethiopians who embark on the overland route, followed by a sea crossing, tend to be men. Some women do make the sea crossing, accompanying brothers and husbands, while others make the journey unaccompanied by a male relative. There is high vulnerability of women who enter as illegal maritime migrants; they may end up being easy preys to robbers, rapists, abductors and even possible traffickers.

More people from Ethiopia than any other single country travelled to Yemen in 2010 and 2011. About 41,000 Ethiopians arrived in Yemen at the end of May, 2012. Most of them are illegal migrants. The growing number of Ethiopian illegal migrants who on daily basis attempt to cross the border



without proper access to food, water and shelter and face difficult situation after entering the place of destination are in need of quick response (United Nations Higher Commission for Refugees, 2012).

Media, relatives and friends report stories about people who died during the trip, who were arrested upon arrival, and who faced life threatening challenges in the receiving country. The problem is so severe that Ethiopian illegal migrants especially those who plan to reach Saudi Arabia but stranded in Yemen are suffering from poor living conditions and physical and sexual abuse (Anbesse, Hanlon, Alem, Packer and Whitley, 2009).

From the review of previous studies made (Sonja and Katie, 2009; Anbesse *et al.*, 2009) we came to learn that researchers give more emphasis to reveal data on the challenges of illegal migrants suffering in the countries of destination as well as in transit countries. However, no study has been conducted on factors that contribute to make a decision to migrate illegally. We are more interested in the current study to understand the factors that contribute to illegal migration decision, despite the challenges and risks migrants might face during travel and on arrival at the host countries. What motivated us to study the issue specifically in Kobo Woreda is that the Woreda is known for the high number of illegal migrants. There is little empirical research that sheds light on the factors that contribute to illegal migrants' decisions to migrate from Kobo Woreda.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of the study was to explore the factors that contribute to illegal migration in Kobo Woreda, the place where the number of illegal migrants is found to be rampant. Specifically, the study aimed (1) to learn about the knowledge of potential migrants regarding the opportunities and challenges of illegal migration, (2) to find out the existing knowledge of potential migrants about the alternative/ legal procedures, processes and channels of migration, (3) to explore the specific factors that lead individuals to decide to migrate illegally, and (4) to distinguish the demographic factors (gender and age) that affect the decision to migrate illegally.

## Review of Related Literature

### Introduction

Illegal migration has mostly been studied in nationwide polls in 'receiving' countries (Ommundsen *et al.*, 2007). The debate on international south-north labour migration tends to focus on the receiving end of migration. This bias obscures a proper understanding of the causes and consequences in the countries of origin of migrants that force themselves to leave for other places. For example, the study conducted by Danish Refugee Council and Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (2012), tried to know the challenges the illegal migrants face in the destination country and ignored what factors contributed to the illegal migration. Another study conducted by Sonja and Katie (2009) discussed about migration and the causes of migration in Ethiopia focusing on the causes of migration for those who had refugee status, but does not include the illegal migrants who did not get refugee status and were not considered as asylum seekers.

There is considerable debate regarding the most appropriate terminology for describing those who are liable to be deported as a result of their illegal immigration status. The main terms used are unauthorized, undocumented, illegal and irregular. Each of which has its proponents and detractors in the migration literature. However, there is some controversy surrounding the adequacy of these terms. The term 'illegal' is associated with criminality, which is viewed as objectionable as the vast majority of illegal migrants are not criminals. The terms 'undocumented' and 'unauthorized' are not accurate descriptions for all the migrants with an illegal status as some have documents and are authorized to be in the country. While the term 'irregular' captures the complexity of the issue, it also has shortcomings as an individual person cannot be 'irregular' but rather be in an illegal situation (Kose, 2005).

Some convergence seems to be emerging on the use of illegal migration as the most appropriate word to refer to migrants whose status does not conform, for one reason or another, to the norms of the country in which they reside. In this study we use the term 'illegal' to represent migrants who are liable to be deported due to their illegal immigration status.



## Theories of Migration

It is difficult to bring together a comprehensive overview of contemporary migration theories across the social sciences and humanities. Migration studies are interdisciplinary and need similar understanding across disciplines and methodologies when migration is the singular focus. However, we can see the predominant theoretical approaches of migration. As a result, we have summarized three basic theories that contribute to understand migration. These theories include the push-pull theory of migration, neo-classical economic theories of the 1970s and 1980s, and the labour recruitment approach. Summary of each of these theories is presented in the following pages.

### Push-pull Theory of Migration:

Ravenstein's work in the late-nineteenth century (Ravenstein, 1885), *the laws of migration*, provided the first systematic principles that explain the dynamics of migration. His work was based on five general propositions.

First, he differentiates between the short and long distance migrants, with male predominance in long-distance migration and female predominance in short-distance migration. Second, Ravenstein identifies a process of stage of migration. Migrants, he observes, come first from nearby villages toward the centre of attraction or urban area, but as industry and commerce continue to grow, migrants are attracted from very distant villages as well. Third, he notes the rural-urban differences in the propensity to emigrate, whereby the urban population displays a lesser propensity to emigrate than the rural populations. Fourth, developments in technology and modes of transportation, Ravenstein argues, lead to an increase in migration. Fifth, the rationale behind the migration process, Ravenstein claims, is an individual rational decision, based on calculations of costs and benefits of migration. Economic factors, to sum it up, in the place of origin operate as what Ravenstein defines as "push" forces which, in combination with what he calls "pull" factors in the destination place, explain migration flows (Ravenstein, 1885).

The basic contention of the supply-push and demand-pull theory is that the origins of international migration are to be found in the economic backwardness of developing countries, where economic conditions operate

as "push" or expulsion forces, fostering legal and illegal migration toward industrialized nations (Appleyard, 1989). The "pull" or attraction factors in receiving countries (higher wages, employment, better welfare systems); as well as "push" factors (lower wages, high unemployment and underemployment rates, slow economic growth or economic stagnation and poverty) are considered causal variables that explain how and why international migration flows originate. Although different applications of these assumptions lead to an emphasis on either attraction or expulsion factors, the conventional tenets of this approach assert that the origins, magnitude, and pace of both legal and undocumented migration can be explained as a function of economic performance of receiving and sending nations (Appleyard, 1989).

#### **Neo-Classical Economic Theories of the 1970s and 1980s**

The neo-classical theory understands migration to be driven by differences in returns to labour across markets (Bauer and Zimmermann, 1999; Massey et al., 1993). The most basic model originally developed to explain migration in the process of economic development in the works of Lewis (1954) and Harris and Todaro (1970) highlights that migration results from actual wage differentials across markets or countries that emerge from heterogeneous degrees of labour market tightness.

According to this theory, migration is driven by geographic differences in labour supply and demand and the resulting differentials in wages between labour-rich versus capital-rich countries. The central argument of the neo-classical approach thus concentrates on wages. Under the assumption of full employment, it predicts a linear relationship between wage differentials and migration flows (Bauer and Zimmermann 1999; Massey *et al.*, 1993). More than 30% wage differential has been set as necessary for the gains of migration to override its costs (Mansoor and Quillin, 2006). In the extended neo-classical models, migration is determined by expected rather than actual earnings and the key variable is earnings weighted by the probability of employment (Bauer and Zimmermann 1999; Massey, Mansoor and Quillin, 2006; 1993).

According to Todaro's (1969) individual cost-benefits model what leads to migration is level of economic opportunity in the origin as well as in the



destination place and costs to move. Migration will be the final outcome after rationally evaluating the costs and benefits of moving. The individual is the main decision maker in isolation from the household or community. The driving force in the explanation is the migrant's expected wage which has to be large enough to convince them to move based on availability of accurate information about wages and jobs in destination areas. However, in some areas which are known for less economic opportunities people may not migrate. Unemployed individuals may prefer to stay in the country of origin. For example, sub-Saharan Africa is the poorest region in the world but small percent of Africa's population engages in international migration (United Nations Development Programme, 2009). Therefore, migration cannot be explained only in terms of economic differentials.

### **The Labour-Recruitment Approach**

Given the limitations of the push-pull or economic-gaps approach, Piore (1979) has presented an alternative framework concerning the origins of migration flows. Instead of focusing on income and wage gaps, Piore's approach looks at employer's recruitment patterns as the central piece of explanation. Since foreign labour recruitment patterns have been initiated by employers, what needs to be addressed is the role of employers in receiving countries be it government agents or other official authorities, acting by means of bilateral or unilateral initiatives; employers, acting directly without governmental auspices; or both employers and government agents acting together. The labour recruitment approach tends to overemphasize employers' needs as the driving "pull" force, while conditions in migrant-sending countries constitute a passive factor.

None of the theories summarized above provide theoretical basis on the distinctive factors (apart from economic factors related to wage differentials) that lead someone to migrate either in a legal or illegal routes. If economy is not the only motivating factor that attracts individuals to migrate, there must be other factors that explain why individuals decide to migrate and choose either the legal or the illegal route. Migration as a social process is one of the specific factors that may explain individuals' decision to migrate.

### **Migration as a Social Process**

Recent research in the field attempts to integrate a variety of approaches into a single framework that is informed by traditional perspectives, i.e., "push-pull theory", labour recruitment, historical-structural approaches, as well as developments on the perspective of the global economy, social and migration networks, and linkages between sending and receiving nations. The emerging approach of international migration is guided by the concept of migration systems, which focuses on both ends of migration flows (Kritz, Mary and Zlotnik, 1992).

This view holds that sending and receiving areas should be analyzed as two components of the migration system, which are interrelated by a complex set of linkages. Relations between states such as trade and financial flows, immigration and emigration policies, complementary nature of labour supply and demand; family and personal networks (remittance flows, family obligations, community solidarity, and information); migrant agency activities (job recruitment, regulations governing the migration process, and contracts with migrant workers); and mass culture connections (international media dissemination, societal acceptance of migrants, cultural similarity, and assimilation) are some of the linkages that demand migration to be a more complex field of study (Fawcett, 1989).

This approach sees migration primarily as a social process rather than a process that results from isolated individual actions. The explanations of migration flows focus on individuals as member of a larger social structure, i.e., family and households, which are influenced by macro-economic factors. Fawcett and Arnold (1987) argue that the focus on migration as a social process attempts to avoid the previous theoretical fragmentation of the study of migration, where individual behaviour was perceived as atomistic.

This approach conceives migration as a dynamic process that takes place over time, within which distinct intervening variables may play a role in its different stages, which, in turn, may influence the flows by shifts in the direction, the size, composition, and volume of migration. Further, the historical perspective on migration flows in this framework allows for the identification of interactions between migration flows and structural



conditions in both sending and receiving countries affecting migration. Therefore, the decision made by a potential migrant to migrate as well as the decision on the routes (legal versus illegal) is influenced by the social factors in addition to the individuals' determination to migrate.

### **Specific Factors Attracting to Migrate Illegally**

In every area, there are countless factors which act to hold people within the area or attract people to it, and there are others which tend to repel them. Migration may result from a comparison of factors at origin and destination. Furthermore, between every two points, there stands a set of intervening obstacles which may be slight in some instances and impossible in others. The most studied of these obstacles is distance. Knowledge of the area of destination is rarely exact, and indeed some of the advantages and disadvantages of an area can only be perceived by living there. Thus, there is always an element of ignorance or even mystery about the area of destination, and there must always be some uncertainty with regard to the reception of a migrant in a new area (Everett, 1966).

Different people can be affected in different ways by the same set of obstacles. What may be trivial to some people - the cost of transporting household goods, for example, may be prohibitive to others. But others may overcome the obstacle and make movement possible. Finally, there are many personal factors like personal sensitivities, intelligence, and awareness of conditions elsewhere, which affect individual entrance and facilitate or hinder migration.

### **Empirical Studies on Migration in Africa**

In addition to the above presentations made on the theoretical conceptualizations of migration, available study outcomes on migration in general and illegal migration in particular in Africa are reviewed and resented below.

### **Illegal Migration in Africa**

Although the global trend in relation to illegal migration tends to be from the least developed countries to the advanced Western and Middle East states, there is uneven economic and social development within Africa, as a result of which some relatively advanced African countries attract regional

level illegal migrants. According to Solomon (2005), South Africa suffers a lot from the influx of illegal migrants from neighbouring countries such as Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Solomon reports that the main reason for a high number of illegal migrations is low wage from the sending countries and relatively better wage in South Africa. However, the majority of illegal migrants are illiterate and unskilled; most of them end up taking low wage employment. Botswana and Namibia are the other two African countries who entertain large number of illegal migrants. Economic disparity is still considered as the main reason for illegal migration of Africans within their continent (Campbell, n.d).

West African countries have long history of inter-regional and international migration. Illegal migration is a common phenomenon within the West African region and across Europe and North America from this region. In West Africa, Cote d'Ivoire is the highest recipient of both legal and illegal migrants (Yaro, n.d). Economic factor is considered as the main determinant of migration in Africa (legal/illegal) as it has been documented by Shaw (2007). Shaw has sampled 10 African countries including Ethiopia and conducted study to estimate the proportion of immigrants to the total population of countries. In this study income differentials that exist between the sampled African countries and those of the countries of destination is found to be the main reason for migration.

Very few information is documented about illegal migration from East Africa including Ethiopia, Djibouti and Somalia. Such information is reported in the form of news, or monthly/quarterly magazines. Other documents are available as organizational reports such as reports by the International Office for Migration and the Refugees and Returnees Affairs Offices of East African Countries. As a result, there is scarcity of data generated from rigorous research about east African migrants. From the type of reports listed above, it becomes clear that there is high number of irregular migrants from east Africa to the Arab countries. These migrants lack basic knowledge of migration process and even do not know the existence of water body (sea) between Djibouti and Yemen (IRIN, 2012).



### **Illegal Migration in Ethiopia**

In the Ethiopian context, there is limited data on the history of illegal migration, the factors that contribute to illegal migration as well as the status of illegal migrants in the countries of destination. However, some documents show that Ethiopians have been crossing the Gulf of Aden to Yemen illegally since 1991 (Yitna, 2006). There might be some experience of illegal migration even before 1991 although we lack documentations. Thousands of illegal migrants have died in the hands of pirates and traffickers who have murdered, robbed and forced refugees into the sea to avoid being caught by Yemeni patrols.

An insight into the processes behind Ethiopians transiting this route comes from a recent IOM mission to Bosaso which interviewed 50 individuals out of an estimated 5,000 Ethiopians at the port (Yitna, 2006). Typically, individuals who are subject to illegal migration come from poor farming families in north eastern Ethiopia and were seeking work in Saudi Arabia. Migrants finance their trip from savings, sale of property and loan. Nearly all illegal migrants travel with the support from their families. The journeys are punctuated by numerous stops. At each stop, migrants are expected to pay a 'broker' from their own pocket, and payment at each stage has to be negotiated and paid for separately (Terrazas, 2007).

### **Summary of the literature**

From review of specific studies conducted in Africa as well as in Ethiopia, it becomes clear that there is a serious gap of knowledge in relation to what specific factors do influence individuals to use illegal routes of migration. The existing body of knowledge demonstrates existence of a clear gap on determining which specific socio-cultural issues motivate people to migrate. Knowing that there is such a gap of knowledge in the existing literature on the factors that force individuals to decide to use illegal migration routes, the current study contributes a piece of data on specific factors influencing decision to migrate illegally.

## Method

### Design

This is a qualitative exploratory study design. Since the issue at hand is related to illegal activities getting into the heart of the matter is not easy. Therefore, the application of qualitative method and exploratory design is more appropriate than other types of research designs (Daniel, 2010). The reason to select a qualitative method with exploratory study design is, thus, to acquire in-depth understanding of people's decision to illegal migrate and the factors that direct such action.

In addition, the voices of participants can be directly heard by using qualitative research method (Robert, 2003). Qualitative method also helps the research team to probe into responses or observations as needed and to obtain more detailed descriptions and explanations of experiences, behaviours, and beliefs. This method also helps to understand the context or setting in which people talk. For these reasons using qualitative method was found to be necessary.

### Study Participants

Data were collected from two groups of participants. They were categorized as direct and indirect participants. The direct participants were potential illegal migrants and the indirect participants were their family members in Kobo Woreda. From the direct participants the interest was to collect data in relation to their own knowledge/understanding about the opportunities and challenges of illegal migration, factors that contributed to illegal migration and what the migrants know about alternative migration processes, i.e, legal procedures. On the other hand, we were interested in getting data from members of the family (indirect participants) about the extent to which they have been involved in the decision making process and their influence on the decision made by the illegal migrants.

The family members include spouse and the parents of direct participants. In-depth interviews were conducted with 13 direct and eight indirect participants. Among the eight indirect participants, seven of them were parents and one was spouse of a direct participant. From the direct participants, nine were males and four were females. In addition, from the



indirect participants, one was male and seven were females. We stopped interviewing at the 13<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of the direct and indirect participants, respectively, as we reached saturation level when issues were raised in a redundant/repetitive fashion. A key informant interview was conducted with one representative from Kobo Woreda Labour and Social Affairs Office. The key informant interview was used to know about the existing programs and activities being performed by the government in order to curb the challenges related to illegal migration. The data generated from the key informant interview was used to crosscheck some of the data provided by the in-depth interview participants.

### **Participant Inclusion Criteria**

One of the inclusion criteria for direct participants was a decision to make illegal migration or those who already started a process to migrate using illegal means. Willingness to participate in the interview was another criterion. The inclusion criteria for the indirect participants include being a spouse or biological/legal parents of the direct participants and willingness to participate in the interview. The key informant was included based on the responsibility he held in the Woreda Labour Office directly related to migration issues.

### **Participant Selection Process**

In order to select the participants, snowball sampling technique was applied. Snowball sampling was identified as an appropriate technique to draw participants of the current type who are participating in an illegal activity and who do not want to be exposed to the public. The first participant was identified through informal connection the research team had established with someone who had access to potential illegal migrants in Kobo. Through the informal connector, the team was successful to contact two potential illegal migrants (one from Kobo and another from a nearby rural *Kebele*) through whom the rest potential illegal migrants were identified and interviewed.

### **Data Collection Technique**

We applied in-depth interviews with potential migrants and their families and key informant interview with the Woreda Labour and Social Affairs Office representative to collect the required data. The contents of the data

collection check-list both for those who participated in the in-depth and key informant interviews, open-ended questions helped to draw data about their experiences, thoughts and feelings in relation to illegal migration. To collect socio-demographic data structured and close-ended questions were included in the questionnaire/checklist.

### **Data Analysis Techniques and Presentation**

We applied narrative data analysis technique to present the stories in narration forms. The first step in data analysis technique was to transcribe data verbatim in its original language (Amharic) in which the interview was conducted. Data translation into English was the second step. This was followed by establishing codes and categories/themes which were based on question items developed for the interviews. On the basis of the themes that emerged out of the data, a final phase in the data analysis was to organize the stories told by different participants on one particular subject of discussion.

### **Limitation of the Study**

This research has identified two clear limitations. The first limitation is that the research was conducted from the perspective of the migrants and their families. It did not include the perspective of the brokers and private recruitment agencies. That means the data from brokers and private recruitment agencies are not cross-referenced. The second limitation of the study is that the conclusions of the research couldn't be generalized to a larger population since it only involved small number of participants and small geographic area.

### **Findings and Analysis**

The findings of the study are organized under three major headings: (1) knowledge about migration, (2) sources of information on migration, and (3) push & pull factors contributing to the decision to make illegal migration. Each heading deals with a number of specific issues.

### **Knowledge about Migration**

Two major questions on the knowledge about migration were posed to participants. One of the major questions was about their knowledge



regarding specific issues related to illegal migration and the other question posed was about the knowledge of participants regarding legal migration.

### **Knowledge about Illegal Migration**

Knowledge about illegal migration is influenced by the level of participants' education. Those participants with better level of educational attainment were able to explain in detail about the challenges and opportunities connected to illegal migration. Eleven of the 13 participants have knowledge about the types of works which are prohibited in the countries of destination such as Saudi Arabia. They also know the type of work that generates better income in short period of time even if it is considered illegal. As a result of such knowledge, the participants decide in advance the type of work they will engage in before they start travelling. One of the participants has the following to say about the type of work he will probably engage in if his illegal migration is going to be successful.

I know someone from Aradam<sup>1</sup>, he worked there only for two years and bought a car. What he was doing in Saudi was selling Areke<sup>2</sup>. Local liquor is profitable illegal business in Saudi Arabia although it is a life threatening engagement. It is common for people from Amhara region who migrate to Saudi Arabia to engage in such illegal business (In-depth Interview with Direct Participant One, April 6, 2013).

Another participant stated that the potential migrants do not have awareness about the challenges they face during their journey, rather they hear about challenges in the destination. However, other participants had explained the possible challenges during the journey and at the destination country as if they experienced such challenges during their previous travel, although they had never travelled. This may give a clue that potential illegal migrants have pre-migration connection with those who already migrated and live in the destination countries or may have direct contact with returnees. Participant 13 from the potential migrants knows about the challenges associated with the journey. He described the possible challenges during the journey as follows:

There are challenges during travel through illegal means. For example, there is a town called Disho-Otto, in Afar Region. It takes eight days on foot to arrive at Djibouti from Disho-Otto. You have to walk for eight days with little access to drinking water. Some will die of hunger. Women are

often raped and have the risk of being HIV positive. There is a probability of experiencing severe hunger, thirst, even death. Crossing the sea to Yemen takes 36 hours from the Somalia port Bossaso and six hours from Djibouti. The migrants have to pay 1,800 to 2,000 Ethiopian Birr for the boat (In-depth Interview with Direct Participant 13, April 29, 2013).

There are other participants who have the knowledge about the challenges they face during the journey but still associate the challenges with fortune. A good example of this is the view expressed by the 11<sup>th</sup> interviewee. She claimed:

Despite the fact that I know the challenges, I have decided to go! I heard that sometimes there is beating and killing. It is a matter of fortune. If someone won't send you a Meshawer<sup>1</sup> you will suffer. We know all bad things that might come. On the other hand, we also know that returnees are building big houses in our community, so it is all about luck (In-depth Interview with Direct Participant 11, April 2, 2013.)

The above statement shows that some of the potential illegal migrants, despite the fact that they have adequate knowledge of the challenges related to illegal migration, have decided to go. They are determined to migrate illegally; they are negligent about the risks.

Participants of this study refer the community view which widely talks about success and failure stories of migrants. Parents proudly talk about the money their children send. There are also re-migrants. Those who suffered in the first migration also decided to re-migrate illegally. According to parents who participated in the study, almost everybody knows such kind of stories. Despite all the challenges they encountered during their previous migration, individuals could decide to migrate illegally again and again. The potential migrants believe that it is better to die in the process of trying to migrate than staying here with poverty.

### **Knowledge on Legal Migration**

Among the 22 participants (both direct and indirect) eight of them claim that they have the knowledge about legal migration. Due to better information access, the participants who are from the urban area know more about the challenges and opportunities of legal migration. They know what kind of families in the country of destination are interested to hire contract



workers, why the employers want to hire contract workers, what advantage they take from the contract workers, and many other details. As the participants stated, the employers who have many families, or work load in their home prefer to employ contract workers to make them stay by using agreements as a binding rule. One of the participants said:

I know a lot about legal migration. It has its own positive and negative sides. The positive sides are: since it is legal you will not have any trouble during the journey and it takes only two hours flight. The negative sides are: you can't change your workplace after three months, even though you don't like the work or the employer. In addition, those who apply to hire a contract worker are people who have excess work in their home (In-depth Interview with Participant One, April 6, 2013).

However, there are also participants drawn from the potential migrants who stated that they have no information about legal migration. Participants who do not have adequate knowledge about legal migration are those drawn from the rural communities.

Some participants argue that the word "legal" does not apply to the agencies recruiting migrants. In their opinion, those agencies are involved in illegal recruitment process. There is no clear control and follow-up from the government and the agencies are not always charged for the illegal activities they are engaged in. Participant six from the potential migrants argued:

It has been said that the agencies who recruit migrants are officially known as 'legal'. But it is hard to consider them as legal because, people are paying too much money for the agencies through the brokers and the agencies have no follow-up strategy for the migrants after sending them to the countries of destination (In-depth Interview with Participant Six, April 17, 2013).

There are also potential migrants who believe that legal migration is by far advantageous than illegal migration. One of the potential migrants who participated in this study claims that she knows in detail about the legal migration process and she had tried to use the legal process to migrate but unfortunately she failed. Although she accepted the legal process of migration as advantageous, she was not willing to tell why she failed to migrate using the legal channel.

### **Sources of Information about Migration**

Among the 22 participants (both direct and indirect) who have the knowledge about migration, 20 of them reported that the returnees, families, and neighbours of the potential migrants are their main sources of information. Five of the 20 participants reported that the brokers are their major sources of information, in addition to returnees, families and neighbours. One participant stated that there is no need to have a story teller. It is adequate to observe the kind of life style such as the decent houses the returnees build, and the amount of money they spend for their personal and family expenses.

The content of the information may vary based on the source. The source of information about opportunities of migration such as better income and freedom of movement including changing of employer in the countries of destination come from friends and brokers. Families of potential migrants focus on providing information about the possible challenges they may encounter during the journey or in the countries of destination.

### **Push and pull factors contributing to the decision to make illegal migration**

**Push Factors:** There are a number of specific factors considered as push factors for migration. Some of these specific factors as documented from the current study are presented below.

Unemployment and "Extreme Poverty": Participants pointed out several reasons that force them to proceed with their decision to process their illegal migration. Ten of the participants attributed unemployment as the main pushing factor for them to decide to migrate to Saudi Arabia. For example, participant four elaborated this as follows.

I am a student with a very good academic performance. However, I decided to migrate because I lost hope that after I complete my education I will not get job opportunities here in Ethiopia. Even, after someone graduates from a university there is no job opportunity equivalent to the level of training. If someone is lucky and gets the job, the salary is not attractive. The income is not enough to lead a living. So, why do I spend much time without hope? (In-depth Interview with Participant Four, April 29, 2013).



“Extreme poverty” is also considered as a pushing factor reported by 16 of the participants. The potential migrants want to live in their country but it becomes difficult for them to fulfil their basic needs. Participant six added on this statement by saying:

We have nothing to do here. In our area, many people are migrating due to a chronic household poverty. The extreme poverty is not due to absence of farm lands in our locality. Instead, the vast amount of farm land is given to investors. At the beginning, we thought, this investment will not have negative impact on the community's life. The investors plant onion as the local communities do. Consequently, the local farmers couldn't compete with them in the market, because they use modern technology and modern market system (In- depth Interview with Participant Six, April 30, 2013).

The study conducted by Spaan and Van Moppes (2006) found out that low employment opportunity is one of the major drivers of migration in Africa in combination with Africa's relatively large number of young population. Another study confirmed that unemployment is a push factor for migration in Ethiopia coupled with the current urbanization trends (Financial Standards Forum, 2009). So, the findings of the current study are in conformity with previous research findings.

#### **Failure to Qualify for Higher Education**

According to the participants, if students fail in national examinations, they usually decide to migrate. Most of these students are 10<sup>th</sup> grade completes. If they want to start some business they do not have initial capital. So, they decide to migrate to generate money to start business. The government is working with financial institutions to provide loan for the young people. But the participants argue that the amount of money these institutions offer is not adequate to start business.

#### **Environmental Deterioration and Inadequate Farm Land**

Potential migrants from the rural area consider environmental deterioration as one of the pushing factors for migration. Because of shortage of rainfall, farmers get small yield which finally forces them to flee.

Participant three added on the above and stated that, “There is no farm land these days. We got our farm land during the Derg regime. Our children are planning to migrate because we are suffering as a result of insufficient farm land.”

**Lack of Justice, Democratic and Political Rights**

According to the key informant interview made with the Kobo Woreda Labour and Social Affairs Office representative, being supporter or detractor of a certain political party creates tension and leads to migration. The absence of justice leads people to decide to migrate. Participant seven reflected how lack of justice led her daughter to decide to migrate illegally. She stated:

The government took my land. It is very cruel! It was a very big size land. Since I'm illiterate and old I couldn't defend about my land use right. They didn't even give me another land in exchange. Over the last couple of years, they provide me some kilograms of wheat as a compensation for the land. But with that land, I would probably produce a couple of quintals of wheat at least once every year! Now, I have no enough land to farm. This made my daughter to decide to migrate" (In-depth interview with Indirect Participant Seven, April 30, 2013).

The research conducted by the Danish Refugee Council and Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (2012) found out that in addition to economic reasons, some Ethiopians were forced or motivated by political problems to leave the country. These included individuals involved in, or accused of being involved in opposition parties and groups identified by the government as terrorist organizations such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). Others, who found it difficult to make a future for themselves in Ethiopia because of their political views and activities, had chosen to leave. The current study documents that, according to the participants of the study, "lack of political rights or being supporter or detractor of a certain political group or party creates tension and lead to migration." Therefore, the findings of this study are in conformity with the Danish Refugee Council and Regional Mixed Migration Secretariats' study.

**Shorter Process to Migrate Illegally**

Nine participants stated that the illegal migration process takes a shorter period of time to reach the country of destination. However, the legal process takes more than five months. Even to get passport it takes more than three months and the long process exposed the potential migrants to exploitations by brokers and traffickers when they stay in the cities. The



potential migrants believe that they can make a lot of money during those months by migrating illegally as quickly as possible.

### **Demographic factors and minimum requirements for using illegal migration channel**

In the illegal route, there is no requirement to migrate for both men and women. However, to use legal channels, there are minimum requirements like the age of the potential migrant which should be 18; this is not necessary for illegal migration.

There are also minimum requirements exclusively applicable to men. One of the participants who is also a potential migrant said, "I heard that being technician, trained in a certain skill or having driving license is required for men to go through legal recruitment agencies." As we can see from the potential migrant's socio-demographic data, there are male illiterate potential migrants who couldn't fulfil the criteria to migrate legally.

The study conducted by the Danish Refugee Council and Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (2012) found that, as women have more opportunities to enter Yemen through the legal process, the majority of Ethiopians embarking on the overland route to Yemen, followed by a sea-crossing, tend to be men. Some women do make the sea-crossing, accompanying brothers and husbands, while others make the journey unaccompanied by a male relative.

### **Health Examination Criteria**

Four of the 22 participants stated that, if the potential migrants do not fulfil the medical test or if they are infected with some disease, like HIV/AIDS they couldn't migrate legally. The only option they have to migrate is using illegal channels. So they decide to migrate illegally.

### **Amount of Payment to Use Legal Recruitment Agencies**

Among the 21 participants who provided data on the amount of payments, 13 believe that the payment that required using the legal recruitment agencies is very high. The potential migrants who are economically poor often decide to migrate illegally because they believe that they cannot afford to pay to migrate through the legal route. To protect the rights, safety and dignity of Ethiopians employed and sent abroad by private employment

agencies Proclamation 104/1998 is enacted. In the proclamation it is stated that the agencies should give services without receiving payments from the migrant worker. According to some of the participants the reality is the reverse. The potential migrants are paying for brokers who work with the legal recruitment agencies. This shows that there is lack of monitoring over the work of legal recruitment agencies in terms of applying the proclamations to serve migrants free of charge.

The research conducted by Helen (2011) found out that it has not been possible to strictly put the proclamation in practice. Her findings show that most migrant women are trafficked by illegal brokers as well as by legal private recruitment agencies. In other words, during the recruitment process of those who use legal channels, there are some illegal features.

Among the 21 participants in the current study, 20 do not know their right regarding the service they can get from private recruitment agencies without payment. One of the participants confirmed this as follows:

I need to have 8,000 – 10,000 birr to use legal recruitment agencies. Where can I find this much money from? I am from a poor family and I could not have that much money. However, comparatively, small amount of money is needed to migrate illegally. Three or four thousand birr is enough to reach the destination (In-depth Interview with Direct Participant Six, April 30, 2013).

As the participants stated, if the migrants who decide to use the legal recruitment agencies reject to pay for the brokers the requested amount of money, the legal recruitment agencies terminate their process.

### **Crime**

If someone commits a crime, she/he may decide to migrate illegally in order not to be jailed. The legal migration route is controlled by government and the criminals may be detained and deported. However, the illegal migration route is less controlled by government so the criminals decide to migrate illegally not to be arrested. The key informant verifies this by saying, "Criminals migrate illegally immediately after they commit crimes. They do not want to use the legal channels because they fear they might be detained."



## **Pull Factors**

There are specific factors that lead individuals to choose the illegal process as a better option to migrate to the Arab countries. Some of these pull factors, on the basis of the data collected from the participants of the current study are presented as follows.

### **Existence of Better Salary in the Country of Destination**

Among the 21 participants who provided data on the specific pull factors that lead individuals to opt for illegal migration, 10 of them consider a better salary in the country of destination as one of the important pulling factor. Comparing between those who migrate using the legal process and those who prefer the illegal one, there is a difference in salary or monthly income. According to the participants, the monthly salary of illegal migrants is better than the migrants who go through the legal process. This difference occurs due to two factors. The first factor being due to lack of signed agreement that binds the employer and the employee. This help the migrants to freely choose any employer who can offer them better salary and pick the highest one. The other reason is that the migrants can be employed in two or more jobs at a time. According to participant 13, the legal migrants earn, mostly, not more than 3,652.00 birr per month. But the illegal migrants may earn from 7,305.00 to 12,175.00 birr per month. As a result of this, there are many cases where those individuals who migrated through the legal means changed their status and turned into illegal migrants once they reached the country of destination. The legal migrants escape from their original employers, which may immediately make them subject to get status of illegal migrants.

### **Freedom of Movement and Less Workload of Illegal Migrants**

Some participants stated that freedom of movement is one of the contributing factors to choose to migrate illegally. When the participants say the illegal migrants are free to move, it does not mean that the government in the country of destination allows them to do whatever they like; instead the illegal migrants are free from the employers' control, since they are working without any contract with single employer. This freedom of movement creates opportunity for the illegal migrants to search for a better job.

One of the participants from the parents of a potential illegal migrant said, "The illegal migrant workers can change their work place whenever they feel unhappy with their employers. However, those migrants who travel through the legal route can only change their work only within three months starting from the first day of signing their contract."

There is also excessive workload on legal contract workers. The employers take the employees to other households within their family network and force them to work in more than one household. They work without getting enough rest. As a result of such workload, the participants reflected that some legal migrant workers suffer from kidney and other infections that come from physical fatigue and emotional distress. But this is not the usual case with illegal migrant workers. Although the indirect participants confirm that illegal migration has challenges during travel, they agree, choosing such migration channel has better opportunity for the migrants once they reach the destination countries.

## **Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations**

### **Conclusions**

Participants of the current study have more or less similar understanding about the challenges and opportunities of illegal migration. However, the knowledge on legal migration varies based on the level of education and origin (rural-urban) of the participants. The potential migrants who come from rural areas know little about legal migration procedures and processes compared to those whose origin is the urban setting. But they know better about illegal migration. The reason for their little knowledge about the legal migration is partly due to lack of exposure to appropriate information and partly due to their little level of literacy. It is safe to conclude that, although participants have the knowledge about both legal and illegal migration, they know little about the procedures and processes of the legal migration channel. This is one of the contributing factors that lead them to prefer the illegal migration channel knowing that they may encounter challenges. Apart from this, potential migrants prefer illegal migration channels due to the easier process and procedure to migrate. It takes much time and long process to use the legal channel.



Since there are a wide variety of domestic jobs available in the country of destination that can be done by both sexes, both women and men migrate illegally to the Middle East. However, due to lack of formal education and training and less access to the formal labour market, the private recruitment agencies are more often looking for women who have better chance to be employed as house maids irrespective of their education level. There are also relatively little opportunities for men to be employed in the areas of farming and herding of animals.

Another important data that drew the attention of this study is the existence of varieties of push and pull factors. One of the pull factors that illegal migrants use as a justification for their choice of the illegal process is the fact that the migrants who use the legal process lack proper protection in the country of destination. On the contrary, the illegal migration gives a relative freedom to those who successfully reach the country of destination using illegal means.

### **Implications**

There are four important implications this study draws which include implications to research, education, policy and advocacy discourses and practice.

### **Research Implication**

The study documents important information to understand the factors that contribute to illegal migration. However, this does not give a full picture about illegal migration practices in the Country. Therefore, there is a need for further studies by including the perspective of the agencies and other areas which are known as sources of information or knowledge for potential illegal migrants. The research also indicates the need for further theoretical explanations about illegal migration. In general the implication of the current study for research is that it raises the appetite to conduct comprehensive and integrative study in order to understand illegal migration at a macro level.

### **Implications for Policy Discussion and Advocacy**

The current study helps policy makers to have information required as evidence to make decisions on policy matters. However, in order to support

the policy environment for a comprehensive policy making process, there is a need to continue to have national level database on migration. Furthermore, on the basis of this small study, we believe that it is possible to organize a policy level discussion and advocacy at local, regional and national levels.

### **Implication for Education**

The data from the current study can be utilized as input to review the content of educational subjects and courses at different levels where lessons on migration are missing. The research can also be utilized as a supplementary teaching aid at different levels of education by presenting some of the stories presented in this study as examples.

### **Implication for Practice**

The findings indicate the areas that need direct intervention such as awareness raising and education on the rights of migrants, humanitarian and protection services for the vulnerable migrants, and others. Therefore, practitioners can use this finding as a base for intervention.

### **Recommendations**

From the current study, it is safe to state that the concerned bodies are urged to raise community awareness about the advantage of using the legal migration process. Emphasis is required to teach community members about the procedure, the roles of private recruitment agencies, the migrants' right during the process and at the country of destination, and the potential migrants' responsibilities and obligations.

To bring long term solution to mitigate illegal migration there is a need to create massive employment opportunities. To this end there is a need to strengthen micro and small scale enterprises; facilitating for small scale farmers to use modern agricultural technologies; developing rural-urban linkage so that agriculture and the industrial sectors feed each other; and import substitute industrial strategies as a means of creating employment. Subsequently, such initiatives at the national, regional as well as at local levels will enhance the country's economy and contribute to at least minimize the number of economic migrants.



Concerned bodies are also advised to assess the impact of large scale farming on the local community and develop the capacity of small scale farmers by facilitating agricultural technology transformation from those large scale farmers to the local community members.

At different levels of educational curricula lessons about migration have to be incorporated to educate students about migration issues.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has to work hard in order to update and revise the procedures/process to become simple and easy for legal migrants to get their passport as quickly and freely as possible. Giving passport in a shorter time will minimize the vulnerability of the potential migrants to economic and gender-based exploitation.

The private recruitment agencies are advised to work hard to assess and ascertain the availability of job opportunities in the country of destination both for women and men on the basis of their educational levels prior to recruitment and sending of migrants.

The government needs to monitor the private recruitment agencies strictly, and charge them when they break the rule. If private recruitment agencies are found to be weak to execute what is expected of them, the government has to identify other options including strengthening the capacity of government institutions, to manage the recruitment process.

If migration is unavoidable, there must be a tailor-made job and competence based training to the migrants that fits to the specific destination country's needs.

The Ethiopian government is required to enter bilateral agreement with the major countries of destination to protect the safety and security of Ethiopian migrants. In the bilateral agreement there is a need to clearly state the responsibilities of the sending country (Ethiopia) and the countries of destination.

Further studies about the causes and consequences of migration should be conducted in the sending country and countries of destination in order to produce comprehensive database of causes and outcomes of migration (both legal and illegal).

Endnote

- <sup>1</sup> Small town found eighteen kilometres away from Kobo.
- <sup>2</sup> Ethiopian local liquor.
- <sup>3</sup> A rental car to cross the border.
- <sup>4</sup> People who are recruited and employed by the local government to keep the security of the community.



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