Examining the Livelihood and Coping Mechanisms of Rural-Urban Young Migrants: The Case of Burayu Town

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Abstract

This article examines the livelihood of rural-urban young migrants and their coping mechanisms in Burayu Town. Burayu Town was selected for the study due to the high concentration of young rural-urban migrants among the recently emerging towns of Ethiopia. Qualitative exploratory approach was used for the study. In-depth interview, focus group discussion and participatory observations were the major tools of data collection. The study shows that poverty and destitution, family related problems and social networks, are the major reasons for rural-urban youth migration. The findings of the study also reveal the challenges the migrants face in the town environment in terms of earning income, winning daily bread and housing. To cope up with the situations the young migrants are involved in various formal and informal activities that range from daily labour to prostitution to diversify their source of livelihood and survive in the town.

Keywords: Rural-urban migration, youth, coping mechanisms, Burayu Town

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Introduction

Migration of young people has become one of the key global features of our time. Globalization together with advancement in technology, information and transportation systems has greatly increased the number of people who have the desire to move to other places (UN, 2006). People migrate to search for a better urban opportunity and livelihood. Especially, young people migrate to towns and cities with the aspiration to generate more income and in search of descent living conditions (Hunnes, 2012; POPIN, 1995). Though migration represents an important livelihood strategy for poor households seeking to diversify their sources of income, it also characterizes the better-off, including many African elites (SAMP, 2006). Thus, it cuts across class and skill boundaries, and exists in widely different geographical and demographic contexts.

Nowadays, in most countries the vast majority of migrants are internal migrants from rural to urban areas (UNDP, 2009). It is widely recognized that internal migration is an activity primarily undertaken by young adults all over the world (IOM, 2005). They make up a disproportionate share of the world's migrants (WB, 2007). For instance, about a third of the migrants who flow from all developing countries are in the age range of 12 to 24 (UN, 2007).

Internal migration is a common phenomenon in Ethiopia. A study by Mberu (2006) has identified Ethiopia as one of the countries in Africa with a relatively high level of internal migration and population redistribution. Rural—urban migration has also been common in Ethiopia since the emergence of modern industrial urban centres. Researchers (Pankhurst, 1958; Bahru, 1972, 1991; Bjeren, 1985; Befakadu, 1978) have documented these earlier rural-urban migrations from historical, sociological and economic perspectives. A master thesis by Worku Nida (1995) also gives an interesting anthropological perspective on the impact of rural-urban migration on a rural village in Gurage Zone.

The rural-urban migration trend in Ethiopia can be explained by a number of so-called push and pull factors (Kunz, 1973). Small size of farm and grazing land, poor farming system, lack of improved agricultural technologies, crop failures, rapid population growth, rural poverty,

ecological degradation, and lack of infrastructural and social services in the rural areas are factors that enforced young people to leave their original home (Ezra, 2001; Gebrehiwot and Fekadu, 2012; Hunnes, 2012; POPIN, 1995). The pull factors are mainly urban attractions such as availability of employment opportunities, urban social amenities, and social networks. The two are very much interrelated and reinforce each other.

In Ethiopia, though there is a consensus that internal migration flows are currently larger than the external ones, the exact number of people who migrate internally is not known due to scanty data available (Fransen & Kuschminder, 2009; Casacchia *et al.*, 2001). In fact, given the kind of migrations we have been observing, the number of migrants to the outside world is also unknown.

IOM (2005) argues that in Ethiopia the majority of migrants are male under the age of 30. The destination of such migration is principally Addis Ababa and a few other regional towns (Bjeren, 1985). Recent official statistics attributes the recent growth of urban population to rural-urban migrations (CSA, 1999). Rural to urban migration accounts for a significant portion of the growth of the Addis Ababa's population (Girmachew, 2006). For instance, a labour force survey in 1999 showed that migrants accounted for 54 percent of the yearly population growth of the city (Eshetu, 2005). Burayu Town, which is the subject of this study, is also another example. In Burayu, according to official sources, rural-urban migrants are estimated to be 61% of the total population of the town (BoFED, 2011). Although most of the population data in Ethiopia have become controversial, according to the 2007 Census the population of Burayu Town was 63,873 (CSA, 2009). The official estimate in 2011 put it above one hundred thousand (BoFED, 2011). This at least shows how much migration factors affect population dynamism in Burayu Town.

Statement of the problem

Young people have always been dominant in rural-urban migrant population both in terms of volume and the effects they have on their place

of origin and destination (Worku, 1995). In fact, reports show that these days they are travelling more than ever before (IRIN, 2007). In terms of its causes, rural-urban young migration is not dominated by a single factor but caused by a combination of multiple interrelated factors. However, it usually happens in response to the deterioration in the living conditions in rural villages. Most of these young people are driven to the urban areas in order to improve their lives and that of their families (Hannes, 2012; Girmachew, 2006).

However, the urban environments are not as welcome as the young migrants expected them to be. Indeed, young migrants are one of the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in a society with adverse living conditions in the urban life environment. They experience numerous economic, social and psychological challenges at their destination. Their living conditions in urban centres are characterized by deprived health service facilities, limited access to employment opportunities, inadequate education and skills, over-crowded slums, mass exclusion, poverty and crime (Amin, 2010; Dzvimbo, 2003; Harris, 2010; Kainth, 2009).

To cope with the multiple challenges, the migrants formulate various livelihood strategies. Empirical evidences conducted in various cities of Ethiopia show that the rural-urban young migrants adopt different survival strategies to cope with the urban life conditions. They revealed that rural-urban young migrants engage in various formal and informal activities to tackle the hardship of living in the city. While the formal sector is dominated by daily labourers, the informal activities are highly diversified. These include commercial sex workers, beggars, scavengers, shoe shiners, lottery sellers, luggage carriers, petty traders and those engaged in vehicle related activities (car washing, watching and parking) (Girmachew, 2006; Hannes, 2012; Lalem, 2002; Gebrehiwot and Fekadu, 2012).

A number of empirical studies have been conducted on the causes, patterns and effects of migration on its sources and destinations. The challenges of rural-urban migrants in the town environment and the coping strategies they adopt have not been the focus of most of the researches on migration. In fact, most of the studies touch up on this issue in passing. It is, therefore, against this backdrop that this paper primarily emphasizes on the livelihood of rural-urban migrants in the urban environment. In addition, this paper

was designed within the context of the recent rapid expansion of Addis Ababa and its peripheral towns such as Burayu. This urban expansion and the discourses of dramatic increase in the alternative livelihood and opportunities have attracted thousands of young migrants from rural areas. This has initiated the authors to examine the livelihood situations of these young migrants and how they cope up with the challenges of life in the urban living environment.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the livelihood of rural-urban migrants and their coping mechanisms by taking Burayu Town as a case. The study further explores the factors that motivate migrants to leave their original home areas; the challenges of urban life situations of young migrants and the effects of the overwhelming migrations of the youth on the town.

Approaches and Methods of Data Collection

This study is qualitative in its approach. It utilized major qualitative data gathering tools such as key informant in-depth interview, focus group discussion (FGD), informal interview and participant observation. These combinations of primary data sources made it possible to have in-depth and information-rich analysis of the reasons for migration and the coping mechanisms of the migrants.

Three kebeles with high concentration of rural-urban migrants have been selected for the study, and snowball sampling was used to identify the informants. First contact had been made with an expert in Labour and Social Affairs Office of the Municipality that directed the researchers to identify key informants and others. A total of 35 individuals (29 migrants and 6 government officials) were interviewed. The interviews were conducted by using semi structured questionnaires and checklists of guiding questions that have helped gather detailed information. Besides individual interviews, four focus group discussions were conducted: two of them with young migrants, one with relevant government officials and the other one with 'non-migrant' residents. Each of the FGDs involved seven participants.

Young migrants who participated in this research were daily labourers, shoe shiners, bartenders, waiters and waitresses and one engaged in commercial sex work. They were selected based on the criteria of being young migrant currently residing in the town. Their willingness to participate, their age (between 15 and 29) and their availability for interview or focus group discussion were also considered.

Secondary data, on the other hand, were obtained from reviewing published literature and unpublished materials that have relevance to the subject matter.

The Study Area

Burayu is one of the eight towns that constitute the Finfinne Zuria Oromia Special Zone. It got the name because of its location, surrounding Addis Ababa. Burayu is located at about 15 kms west of Addis Ababa on the Addis Ababa – Ambo main road. Geographically, the town is located between 9⁰ 02-9⁰ 02¹ 30¹¹ North latitude and 30⁰ 03¹ 30¹¹ to 30⁰ 41¹30¹¹ East longitude. It is bordered by Sululta and Mulo *Woreda* to the North, Addis Ababa City Administration to the East, Welmara *Woreda* to the West and Sebeta *Woreda* to the South.

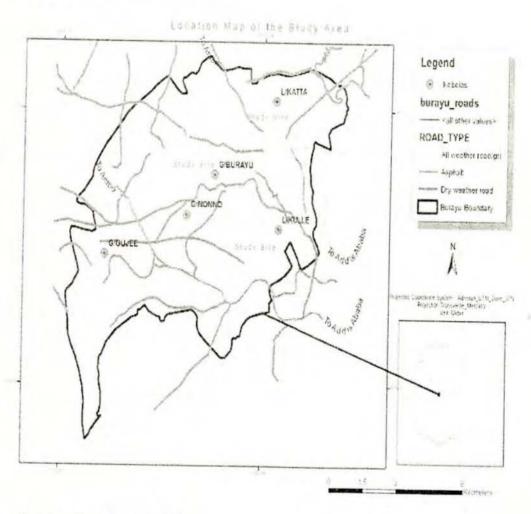
Before the establishment of the municipality, the town had passed through different kinds of administrative entities. It was ruled by several land lords during the Imperial Regime, and was a peasant association during the military regime. Owing to proximity to Addis Ababa, and the recent booming in housing construction in and around Addis Ababa, the town has got great momentum recently. The town is characterized by fast growing manufacturing, medium and small-scale industries and services. In 2007 it has been restructured and recognized as one of the 'first level towns' in the Oromia National Regional State.

Currently, the town is divided into five *kebeles*: Lakku Katta, Gefersa Burayu, Lakku Kulle, Gefersa Guje and Gefersa Nonno. This study is conducted in three selected *kebeles*: Lakku Katta, Gefersa Burayu and Lakku Kulle. These kebeles are characterized by the presence of large number of factories that have immensely contributed in attracting young migrants to the town.

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Study Site

Fig1. Location of the study site



Source: Authors' Design, 2014

Findings and Discussions

The findings of the study are divided into three major areas: causes of rural urban migration, challenges of urban livelihood and the coping strategies of the migrants, and the effects of migration on Burayu Town.

Causes of rural-urban migration: Push factors

Causes of rural-urban migration are usually divided into two: the push and the pull factors. Two push factors have been reiterated now and then by our informants as the main reasons for their migrations. These are poverty and destitution and family related problems. In the following section, we describe each one of them briefly.

Poverty and destitution

Poverty is one of the reasons for young people to migrate. Young people leave their homes forced by economic challenges to satisfy their basic needs. The life of the families of the migrants is based on subsistence farming. The overwhelming majorities of the migrants we interviewed indicated that agriculture was their sole income generating activity. It is not only about agriculture being a mono sector on which they depended, but also all of them indicated that the income they used to generate from agriculture is not sufficient to support the family. This problem is attributed to, as reported by the interviewees, shortage of farmland, small and fragmented landholding, shortage of rain or occurrence of recurrent drought, and absence of irrigation.

Furthermore, they stated that population pressure on the already fragmented land for house construction and agricultural expansion, lack of off-farm employment opportunities, food insecurity, and their families' inability to pay debts for credit (for fertilizer and improved seeds) are also the reasons that compel the youth to leave their original places¹.

Family problems

The study also revealed that family breakdown, family conflict, divorce and death of one or both parents are among reasons for youth migration. Most of the participants in this study have either lost at least one of their parents or their parents are separated. As a result of this, the migrants feel insecure about the situation at their home and convince themselves that they might not lead a better life at their birth place. These problems psychologically affect the young and force them to decide to look for another means of survival outside of their home areas. In this regard, a young migrant who participated in the in-depth interview shared with us his own experience which is a striking example of the relationship between family problem and youth migration:

I was born in Akaki. I am an orphan. I don't have brothers and sisters. Even I don't know any of my relatives. I didn't have name till I know myself and took a name Abdi Rabi (Child of God). I began to help myself by doing various casual works. I joined the street because I have had no one to support me after the death of my parents. I helped myself by shining shoes while I was in Akaki. Finally, I decided to come here a year ago to look for better job.²

Besides the economic problems that lack of family entails, such people have no emotional bond that would keep them at their place of birth. In other words, they lack a reason to stay at the place of origin and bear other problems; thus such problems easily motivate the youth to move to other places.

Urban pull factors

We have divided the urban pull factors into two: urban facilities and social networks.

Urban social facilities

The findings of the study identified that better access to informal sector, better rate of payment for urban jobs and labour market, better urban social amenities and services like road, light, education and health care are some

of the factors that attract the youth to move to the town. Reasons forwarded by about half of our respondents can be subsumed under this category. Most of the migrants also mentioned that they moved to Burayu believing that they would benefit from increasingly available jobs in relation to booming constructions including condominium houses and cobble stone roads.

Social networks

Many respondents have noted that they are motivated to move to the town by pressure from friends. The findings of the study also show that migrants were highly influenced by the information they obtained from friends, relatives and neighbours who are residing in the town. One of the participants explained how he decided to move to Burayu and the opportunity that awaited him in the town as follows:

Three years ago my two friends migrated to Burayu Town. They returned to visit their family after two years. They were better dressed and good looking. Myself and other youngsters in the village were so curious to hear the living conditions in the town from them. They told us about the urban life, the infrastructure and the availability of job. All of them were attractive, even though highly exaggerated. Two of us followed them. But when we arrived everything was not what we heard and in fact very far from what we expected³.

We heard similar stories from many informants. Most of them were school dropouts who were desperate to get something for their living. The urban attraction such as the elements of modernity they heard from their friends who spent sometimes in the town also easily fascinated them. When they arrived in the towns, they found out that urban life is demanding and challenging. In fact, most of them were disillusioned with what they expected and what really awaited them as the following discussions try to show.

Challenges of urban life and migrants' coping mechanisms

As we have mentioned above, most of the young migrants from the rural areas did not have the full picture of life in the town either because of lack of information or the unreliability of the information they had managed to get before they moved to the town. The information they gathered from

their friends who had access to urban life depicted only the positive sides of life in the town. They came to the town to fulfil their needs and desires which they could not fulfil in the rural areas. In fact, some of them told us that they expected life in the town to be easy going. To the contrary, when they arrived all of our informants were unable to find regular jobs and better income to fulfil their daily needs. Moreover, the town dwellers usually put the migrants in helpless conditions. During our FGD with migrants, discussants emphasized how much they encounter physical, social, psychological and economic challenges. According to their report, most of them have experienced violence, labour exploitation, discrimination and sexual abuse, besides the challenges of joblessness and problems in meeting daily basic needs. As a result, they started to reflect on themselves that town life has not welcomed them⁴.

In the following we will discuss some of the challenges and the strategies the migrants use to cope up with life in the town environment by emphasizing on three basic areas: earning income, daily food and housing.

Earning income

The first serious challenge the migrants face when they arrive in the towns is how to earn income for their survival. The results of in-depth interview and focus group discussions show that young migrants in the town are involved in some formal and informal activities to earn money. There is no work that the migrants are not willing or reluctant to do. They engage themselves in any activity which fetches them a coin. The male migrants in the town are usually involved in activities such as lottery selling, loading and unloading of goods, shoe shining, begging, weaving and urban vegetable growing. The female migrants, on the other hand, most of the time, work as daily labourers, house-maids, nannies, waitresses, sex workers and petty traders in order to earn their daily income.

Female migrants told us that becoming a housemaid and nanny is considered as most successful endeavour. One of our female informant clearly said, "When you become a housemaid or a nanny, first, you do not have to pay for housing and food, the two most important things to survive,

and second, you have small but regular income." Thus, many female migrants wish to become housemaids and nannies. But it has also its own challenges such as cooking skill to meet the expectation of an urban household and social and linguistic ability for interaction.

The ever-increasing number of young migrants seeking jobs has resulted in fierce competition among the migrants in the town. Some of the respondents in the group discussion reported that as a result of the stiff competition among the young job seekers, work is no more classified based on sex. Currently, it is a common practice for women to engage in physically demanding construction works. Men are also involved in fetching water, cleaning houses and washing clothes. It is also not uncommon to see migrants fighting over meagre jobs available. A minor competition over loading or unloading of furniture from a small car may lead to inter-group fighting.

The migrants came from various ethnic groups and are speakers of different languages. Some of them speak only Oromiffa. Others speak Hadiya, Kambata, etc. Interestingly, when language is a barrier for them in order to approach and participate in the daily works which have relatively better returns, the young migrants group themselves under those friends who are able to communicate.

Daily food

Getting the day's meal is one of the main challenges that many migrants face in the town. The majority of our informants reported that they invest most of their time and energy to obtain their daily bread. They said that the income they obtained is not, most of the time, sufficient to cover their daily expense for food. Sometimes when they fail to generate income because of absence of work, they approach owners of restaurants and negotiate for leftover food in exchange for cleaning, carrying loads and washing dishes. They can also buy such leftovers from the restaurants if they have some money that is not sufficient to buy proper food. The research participants mentioned that if they have generated some income, they buy foods at low cost usually locally baked breads for saving some money. There are times when the migrants skip their breakfast and lunch or sometimes spend the

whole day without any food. Most of them make every effort to eat twice a day. They usually skip breakfast and have early lunch⁶.

Housing

Housing is another major challenge young migrants face in the town. Informants who participated in the in-depth interview and FGD noted that unless they have friends or relatives, it is not uncommon for newly arriving young migrants in the town to spend the first few nights sleeping in church yards, verandas or streets close to institutions such as banks, which have protections. Several migrants showed us the street where they had spent few days. It is close to a building where two commercial banks are situated on the one side and a fuelling station on the other. When they begin earning some income they join other migrants whom they came to know as labourers to rent houses in groups, five or six individuals congested in a room⁷.

The relevant officials who participated in the focus group discussion noted that the urban residents have no interest to let their houses to the migrants because of lack of trust on them. Some migrants pay on daily bases because of lack of trust from the renters. Even more problematic, according to these officials, is that the young migrants usually negotiate with the landlord to rent the house in groups. Thus, they have usually been accused of badly handling the houses. Due to this accusation as well as price factors, the migrants rent shanty houses in slum areas where social facilities are inaccessible and uncomfortable for living. That on the other hand also contributed to the expansion of slum areas. Not surprisingly, most of the migrants have limited access to the social amenities which partly attracted them to migrate to the town.

Our findings indicate that the overwhelming majority of migrants have faced severe challenges in their life situations in the town, and came to the conclusion that their previous rural livelihood was better than what they are experiencing in the town. When we refer to our field note, out of twenty nine individual interviewees we met, only four of them reported that they enjoyed urban life as compared to rural life.

Effects of rural-urban migration

Youth rural-urban migration has numerous effects on the existing socioeconomic system of the town. In particular, it has an intense and severe pressure on limited resources of the town. Officials are of the feeling that the high population growth of Burayu, which is basically the result of youth migration, diminishes the quality of the town.

During focus group discussion, the residents emphasized the increasing rate of theft, gambling and violence in the town. They attribute the legal transgressions and violence practiced in the town to the rural-urban young migrants. Others blame the migrants for the ever growing problem of housing in the town. According to an informant, "previously many people prefer to live in Burayu and work in Addis Ababa as house rent was much cheaper. However, recently due to these migrants, the town is facing shortage of housing. We faced previously unseen sky rocketing cost of living." They further blame the migrants for environmental pollutions. One resident said, "Because the slum areas lack infrastructures including toilets, migrants defecate on the open air leading to pollutions." Some of the accusations seem contradictory as they are accused of contributing to the increasing cost of living, including housing problems, on the one hand and the expansion of slum areas on the other.

The relevant government officials who participated in the study noted that an uncontrolled and high volume of rural-urban migration to the town has resulted in the expansion of squatter settlements, over crowdedness, and traffic congestion ¹¹. Indeed, observers including ourselves commented similarly. During late afternoons the streets are so crowded that some people complain about the difficulty of driving in Burayu. Those who claim they are natives of Burayu accuse the migrants of significantly contributing to the ever increasing rate of unemployment ¹². The Burayu administration also shares the concern. According to the data from the Office of Labour and Social Affairs, in April 2013, there were 12,000 registered unemployed young people in the town, and most of them are migrants.

In Burayu people tend to attribute all social problems to the rural-urban migration. It seems that some kind of panic and phobia towards the rural-urban migrants is developing. On the other hand, youth rural-urban

migration has positive effects on the town in addressing the demand for labour force in construction and manufacturing industries, urban agriculture and other sectors that demand labour force for relatively cheap price. Most of our informants, including Burayu administration officials, do not want to emphasize this aspect of the story.

Conclusions

The primary aim of this study was to examine the livelihood of young ruralurban migrants and their coping mechanisms to survive in the town environment by taking Burayu Town as a sample. Besides, the study also explored and analyzed the factors that forced young migrants to leave their original home areas and move to the town, and the adversity they have brought to the town.

The findings of the study concur with many similar studies in Sub-Saharan Africa. The young migrants move to the towns to get rid of poverty and to change their livelihood situation by enjoying urban opportunities. However, life in the town environment was not as simple as the young migrants expected it. Indeed, the findings show that the livelihood of the migrants in Burayu is full of challenges. In line with Harris' (2006) argument rural-urban migrants engage in mini activities which are not better than their previous works. Most of them came from agricultural background and ended up as shoe-shiners, house cleaners, and unskilled labourers. The migrants' livelihood and coping strategies are very much similar with Girmachew's (2006) study of livelihoods and survival strategies among migrant children in Addis Ababa. Migrants usually engage in several activities that help them secure their daily bread.

Rural-urban migrations in Burayu have resulted in congested and overburdened environment, putting pressure on insufficient infrastructures, increasing unemployment rate, sanitation problems and pollution. Besides, residents and relevant officials expressed their concern over the increasing rate of violence, gambling and other legal transgressions. When they fail to meet their expectations, migrants may turn to violent acts of theft, robbery and other similar activities. Similar to our findings, McCatty (2004) and

Sommers (2013), among others, documented other experiences in which rural-urban migration have created a near panic situation among urban elites in other countries.

Therefore, intervention strategies should be designed by the government, non-government organizations, community development and other relevant stakeholders to address the causes of the rural-urban young migration and the challenges the migrants encounter in the course of their struggle with living conditions in the town environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are forwarded.

- Primarily, rural-urban migration should be properly recognized. As it stands now, it seems that the volume and seriousness of internal migration, especially the rural-migration is not properly known. Policy makers should make use of research findings and rely on the expertise they get from research.
- We believe that rural-urban migration is part of the existing poverty in the country. It cannot be addressed separately. An integrated holistic approach that deals with rural poverty should be pursued. Off-farm livelihood schemes including trades and business, micro and small scale industries, and improved agricultural extension should be promoted. Access to resources by the youth, particularly access to land and other communal resources should be ensured.
- The findings of our study show that most of the young migrants left their home areas based on distorted information and very exaggerated image of urban opportunities. Thus, education should help the youth develop all rounded knowledge of their environment. The youth should not be easily persuaded by friends to leave their homes and migrate based on empty promises.
- An enabling environment should be sought for the young migrants in the
 towns. This also needs a solid knowledge of the livelihood of the
 migrants, challenges they face in the towns and the impact of migration
 both on the rural and town environment. A strategy that would help the
 migrants lead a descent life and contribute their share to the development
 of the country should be sought.

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Endnote

Focus group discussions with migrants in Lakku Katta Kebele, Burayu Town, March 2013.

² Interview with a migrant in Lakku Katta Kebele, Burayu Town, March 2013.

³ Interview with a migrant in Lakku Kule Kebele, Burayu Town, March 2013.

⁴Focus group discussion with migrants in Lakku Katta Kebele, Burayu Town, March 2013.

⁵ Interview with a migrant in Lakku Kule Kebele, Burayu Town, April 2013.

⁶ This survival strategy was repeatedly mentioned in focus group discussions with migrants in several focus group discussions.

⁷This has been reflected in both interviews and focus group discussions in almost all

kebeles.

⁸Focus group discussion with officials of Burayu Town Municipality, April 2013.

⁹ Focus group discussion with 'non-migrant' residents of Geferssa Burayu Kebele, Burayu Town, April 2013.

An individual from the focus group participants explained this after the end of the focus group discussions in Geferssa Burayu Kebele, Burayu Town, April 2013.

11 Focus group discussion with officials of Burayu Town Municipality, April 2013.

¹² Focus group discussion with 'non-migrant' residents of Geferssa Burayu Kebele, Burayu

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