

**Practices and challenges of reintegration of female return migrants in Ethiopia: the case of domestic labor migrants in East and West Arsi Zones of Oromia Regional State**

**Kassim Kimo<sup>1</sup> and Gezahegn Gurmu\*<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology, College of Education & Behavioral Sciences, Arsi University, Ethiopia.

**\*Corresponding Author** Email: [gez.nas2010@gmail.com](mailto:gez.nas2010@gmail.com)

***Abstract***

*The objective of the study was to assess the return migrants' state of reintegration. Qualitative approach was used to obtain data from 32 return migrants that were included in the study by availability sampling method. They were drawn from two districts of Arsi zone and West Arsi zones of Oromia regional state. The economic, social, and psychological aspects that influence human life were taken as theoretical framework for the study. The qualitative data generated from the participants indicated variations among the return migrants in their reintegration. It was observed that only two migrants were successful in all the three dimensions of reintegration. The researchers feel that psychological reintegration must be highly related to their economic situation as they frequently mentioned economic problem for the cause of their being scared in the community. The majority (24) of the return migrants were successfully reintegrated in the social dimensions of life. The socio-cultural values of the community had contributed greatly in this regard. The return migrants' failure to reintegrate was worsened as they could not find the money they had sent to their family from abroad. Almost all of them could not get back their money as their family used the migrants as source of income to solve their economic problem. In the process of their reintegration, return migrants lacked attention from the local government in their economic reintegration. Therefore, the [forced] return migrants require multifaceted approach: job opportunity (or economic support), skills training, and psychosocial support.*

*Keyterms: economic, female, psychological, reintegration, return migrant, social*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Background of the Study**

In academic literature there is conceptualization of forced return of migrants and their reintegration as broad processes dependent upon various factors instead of the simple return of migrants to their home of origin. It is fundamental to recognize that return migration is often a situation where the returnees have limited options, as they are generally no longer welcomed in the host country. The return migration may be considered forced return (especially in Ethiopian situation) as migrants come back before they had earned enough money to reduce their poverty that had pushed them to migrate. Return migration is therefore bounded by many challenges and it leaves the return migrants to suffer from traumatic experience. Forced return migration often occurs in emergency situation, placing significant pressure on the country to which they return. It also gives hard time for organizations managing the crisis of the returnees, and the situation becomes more challenging for the individual (Kuschminder, 2017). This was the reality that Ethiopian female returnees had frequently experienced when they were forced to repatriate from Arab countries.

It is stated in International Organization for Migrants, IOM (2010) that reintegration is re-inclusion or re-incorporation of a return migrant into the society of his or her country of origin or habitual residence. While the reintegration process is multidimensional, three crucial aspects are identified for a return migrant to reintegrate. One of these aspects is the economic reintegration by which migrants participate in the economic system of the country, and shares earnings. It is the most studied topic in empirical studies of the process of return migrants' reintegration. The economic reintegration of returnees is associated with the returnees' social situation which in turn determines their psychological wellbeing. The second aspect is the social reintegration which reestablishes reinsertion of migrants into the social structures of the society. This includes restoration of relationships

with friends, relatives, and neighbors. It also creates opportunity to have the rights of the civil society, and to participate in social structures such as associations, self-help groups, engaging with social networks and sense of community attachment. As stated in Åkesson & Eriksson-Baaz (2015), social relations appeared to be crucial in the overall well-being and emotional needs of returnees besides its material function. The third aspect is psychological reintegration in which the return migrants secure their wellbeing in terms of re-establishing self-esteem and confidence (IOM, 2010).

In Ethiopian situation, the return migrants from the Middle East countries are domestic workers. They are basically female employees who stay in the host country for a limited number of years. They may find difficult to adapt to the culture of the host country as they have fully adapted to the culture of their home country and limited in exposure to other countries' culture. Moreover, social network of the domestic female workers is primarily comprised of locals with minimal to no interaction with other return migrants and access to information (Kuschminder, 2017). As argued in the same documented, involuntary return is a major obstacle for personal development and reintegration of the returnees and it is much more likely to fail, and even they are more likely to re-migrate. It is more probable that involuntary returnees are vulnerable to economic, social and psychological problems upon their return to their country of origin and face several challenges in the process of reintegration.

In some studies family roles was used as factors for the analysis of return migrants' reintegration. Results have indicated differences in the social reintegration of return migrants in terms of identified experiences; for example, the majority of return migrants in Vietnam experienced a negative change in their social relations compared to their relation status before they had left the country (IOM, 2010). The study reported that the return migrants experienced a lack of understanding about their return on the part of family, friends, neighbors and people in the community. Reverse outcome was observed in Chobanyan (2013) study conducted on Armenian returnees. It was found out that, after

return, family members provided psychological support, gave them an update in the current situation, re-established networks, and assisted in the search for employment for the Armenian return migrants. It was also revealed in Birara's (2017) study that hopelessness, social isolation and development of low self-esteem prevail in the return migrants from Saudi Arabia. Barrett and Mosca (2012) also found out feelings of disappointment, isolation, and alienation among return migrants from Arab countries.

The process of reintegration is effective in the presence of supportive mechanisms like return policies, social networks including concern of the returnees' families as it plays a key role in facilitating and supporting return migrants (Kuschminder, 2017). Accordingly, it is appropriate to argue that reintegration can be considered sustainable when returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychological wellbeing that allow them to cope with their traumatic experiences they had encountered in the migration, return and reintegration processes. L

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

From the review of studies on return migration indicate that the focuses were on intentions to migrate and return; and on the circumstances of return migrants' reintegration process, including difficulties and challenges faced by returnees. However, studies are rare on reintegration difficulties of migrants after they have returned to their country though the situation of migrants has been extensively studied.

Among the Ethiopian Regional States, Oromia was leading in the number of females migrating to Arab countries. From Oromia Regional state, Arsi and West Arsi zones are among those zones where the incidence of female migration became pervasive (MoLSA, 2010). Poverty is the driving force for the domestic female migrants to illegally flow to the Arab countries to seek for employment opportunities (Gezahegn & Kassim, 2017). It was reported in Kuschminder (2017) that returnees who returned from the Middle East to

Oromia, Tigray and Addis Ababa were 38.14%, 26.80%, and 20.62%, respectively. With the flow of return migrants to Ethiopia, reintegration had become a topical issue. This was because the return migrants in Ethiopia were often in vulnerable situations and need assistance to fully reintegrate back into either society of their origin or in the community where they had settled after return. The present researchers had given psycho-social support to the return migrants (as community service) in the two zones. However, observation of information obtained from pilot survey that had been conducted before this study, had witnessed that those returnees were not reintegrated and had acute social, economic, and psychological problems, and some of them had the intention to re-migrate as they had sense of social alienation, and had feelings of unproductiveness and dependence. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out practices, and challenges in the process of reintegration of the female migrant returnees in terms of economic, socio-cultural roles and psychological support.

### **1.3. Basic research questions**

The questions stated hereunder had guided the study.

- 1) What was the situation of the economic reintegration of the return migrants?
- 2) What was the situation of the return migrants' social reintegration in the community?
- 3) What was the return migrants' condition in terms of psychological reintegration?
- 4) What were the challenges and opportunities to improve reintegration of the return migrants?

### **1.4. Objectives of the Study**

The major objective of the study was to evaluate the return migrants' economic, social and psychological reintegration situation.

Specifically, the study was to:

- 1) assess the situation of the return migrants' economic reintegration,

- 2) examine the situation of the return migrants' social reintegration in the community,
- 3) evaluate the return migrants' state of psychological reintegration, and
- 4) identify the challenges and opportunities to improve reintegration of the return migrants.

### **1.5. Scope of the study**

The participants of the study were the female return migrants who had returned back to Ethiopia from Arab countries since 2012. Specifically, the participants were the returnee migrants who had been given training and psychosocial support by the present researchers two years ago (during community service provision to the target group in the study site). The aspects of the study included the return migrants' situation of economic, social and psychological reintegration.

### **1.6. Significance of the study and beneficiaries**

The return migrants may get attention from the government. The government appointees can use the evidences of the findings to evaluate and revise their strategy to reintegrate the returnees. Different stakeholders can use the finding as supplementary evidence to their own monitoring and evaluation results. The study result can be used as real evidence indicating failure in economic and psychological reintegration for the majority of the returnees.

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **2.1 An overview of the nature of migration**

Migration is a world phenomenon and an issue of discourse and a source of worry for leaders of nations today. A number of African people migrate to Arab countries and to Europe. Migration in the developing countries basically emanates from economic problem. In Ethiopian situation, the primary objective of migrants, particularly female domestic migrants, is to earn money to solve their economic problem. There had been

employment agents who facilitate migration process for the domestic female home servants to enter an Arab country. It is stated in (IOM, 2017) that the procedure of sending migrants to the host country subjects the migrants to be dependent on the agents. The argument is that the condition of employment through the agents has compelled the migrants not to leave or change an employer as it requires the consent of the agent who facilitated the migration; otherwise, the agent discloses that the migrant worker was an illegal (IOM, 2017). The condition exposed the domestic workers to exploitation and abuse by the agents/employers to whom their “legal existence” was tied. Anbesse et al. (2009, reported that female domestic workers returning from the Arab countries encountered psychological disturbance and mental health problems.

## **2.2. Theoretical framework for the study**

Existing literature on reintegration explains the effect of economic, social and psychological experiences of return migrants before migration, in the country of migration, and return aftermath. These interrelated factors of reintegration were considered and used as a theoretical framework for the study. The intent for migration is derived before migration by poverty which is the root cause and put the domestic migrant workers in underprivileged position in the home country. Planning for migration is done by the migrant’s whole family, sometimes subjecting the domestic females to forced migration. This emanates from aspiration for earning sufficient amount of money in the host country for some years and returning back to run a better business (IOM, 2017). Up on the necessity of returning back home, the domestic female workers’ readiness in accumulating their earnings at the host country affects their success in reintegration after return. Domestic migrants to the Arab countries are basically low-skilled and low-paid, and are vulnerable to economic, social and psychological crises (Kuschminder, 2017). After return, in the process of reintegration, the forerunning issues of return migrants are mainly provisions for reintegration such as access to plot of land, housing, consumption materials and access to essential services (Alkida, 2019).

Reintegration could also be affected by the conditions of supports the return migrants get from their family, relatives, community, government agencies and other stakeholders including NGO's. The support includes financial, material, employment, social relation and psychological support for smooth reintegration. Reintegration is sustainable if a return migrant is supported and reinstated socially, economically and in overall wellbeing of her/his living in a long-lasting condition relative to the community members they returned to. Return migrants' success or failure in economic and social reintegration in turn determines the psychological wellbeing of the return migrants.

### **2.3. Empirical research outcomes on reintegration**

There are limited researches done on the process of reintegration in line with the theoretical basis stated above. Available researches indicate that migration experience as well as the process of return migration are stressful, and negatively impacted the return migrants economically, socially and psychologically (Alkida, 2019). Therefore, difficulties faced by migrants in the process of migration, in the host country, and the socio-economic condition of their family worsen the reintegration process.

#### **2.3.1 Economic reintegration of return migrants**

Economic reintegration is probably a basic and a determining factor for sustainable reintegration of return migrants. As poverty is the major driving force behind the migration phenomenon from Ethiopia to the Arab countries, it is logical to say that the social and psychological crises emanate from economic crises in the home country. The study by Gezahegn & Kassim (2017) had indicated that women had been the majority of the migrants to the Arab countries, and consequently they were the major population of the migrants who had suffered from the economic, social and psychological crises leading them to stressful life situation after return. Economic reintegration facilitates and simplifies the social and psychological reintegration. It is important as it guarantees the livelihood and the wellbeing of the returnees. As stated in Alkida (2019), participation in



business positively influences social reintegration (such as social networks) and the psychological well-being of returnees (such as building self-esteem and self-confidence). Hence, economic reintegration is also a guarantee for sustainable reintegration as there has been concern for increasing tendency of the returnees for remigration.

### **2.3.2 Social reintegration**

As stated in Alkida (2019), next to the economic function, social relations appeared to be crucial in the overall well-being and emotional needs of return migrants. Social reintegration is the return migrants' regaining of the right to involve themselves in all socio-cultural affairs of the local community of their country of origin. This includes on one hand retaining previous social acceptance and establishing a good personal network, and involvement in the structures of civil society, like associations, and other socializing organizations (IOM 2010). Success in the process of social reintegration partly depends on the returnees' social ties to the home country during their stay abroad (IOM, 2017). If migrants stay in contact with friends and family at home, the social networks would support and facilitate the returnees' return and reintegration processes.

### **2.3.3 Psychological reintegration**

Personal and social encounters like change in lifestyle, thoughts, emotions, social relations, and the way the problems are managed determine the state of psychological reintegration of return migrants. A few studies had been conducted on the psychosocial problems of return migrants. Reintegration failure is associated with the traumatic experiences they had encountered in the process of migration (Gezahegn & Kassim, 2017). It is stated in Ham, et al. (2014) that there is an experience of encountered trauma that might remain stained in their mind and creating psychological stress thereby contributing to the complexity of reintegration.

## **2.4 Challenges of Ethiopian domestic female migrants**

A public view indicates that the Ethiopian immigration offices are crowded by female migrants. Reports indicate that 68 percent of Ethiopian migrants in the Arab countries and Sudan were females as identified by country of migration and gender (IOM, 2010). Conversely, the number of Ethiopian male migrants flowing to South Africa dominates the number Ethiopian female migrants. The number of Ethiopian female domestic workers migrating to the Middle East countries had been increasing before the incidence of COVID-19.

The domestic female workers leave their country illegally in search of employment. Most of the migrants migrate to win their economic problem though they were not aware of the living conditions awaiting them in the host country while some had heard of cases of abuses of migrant workers before migration (MoLSA, 2010). The Ethiopian domestic female workers in the Arab countries were suffering from inadequate earnings but overloaded work and sexual abuses, which in turn contributes to complication of the migrants' reintegration processes after return (Gezahegn & Kassim, 2017). The other social aspects of challenges the return migrants encounter is related to individual migrants' social background, like marriage history and strength of relationships the migrants had with their family before migration, during migration, and after return.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

#### 3.1. Research design

The study was intended to find out practices and challenges the return migrants had faced in the process of reintegration. The general research design employed for the study was qualitative approach by which unstructured in-depth interview study method was applied to assess and understand lived experience of the return migrants. The qualitative data obtained were coined in line with difficulties return migrants had experienced in the countries of migration, and its relation to the economic, social and psychological reintegration.

#### 3.2. Research participants and sampling

Arsi University (to which the researchers are affiliated) had provided professional support to 360 female return migrants who had settled in eight districts of Arsi and West Arsi zones of Oromia regional state in Ethiopia since 2012. The community service program was given in 2018 academic year in terms of training and provision of seed money. The participants of the present study had been sampled from the return migrants who had participated in the program. The sample participants were drawn from two randomly selected districts (one district from each zone). The participants were similar in nature as they were all females, all returned from Arab countries, and had participated in the community service of the university. Thus, 32 participants were included in the study using availability sampling technique as they were dispersed in the villages of the districts. In the interview sessions, 20 return migrants (10 individuals from each district); and for FGD sessions, 16 return migrants (8 individuals from each district), had participated.

### **3.4. Tools for data collection, and its validation**

Unstructured in-depth interview and focused group discussion (FGD) were used to generate qualitative data along with individual data form to obtain demographic information of the female return migrants. The interview guidelines and discussion topics for FGD were set with contents that probe the practices and challenges of return migrants in terms of economic, social and psychological reintegration. In order to avoid specific validity threats that might be induced by the influence of culture and religion (which may put them in conflict with their own thought) not to expose their traumatic experiences, the strategy used were holding repetition and intensive interview sessions.

### **3.5. Data collection procedure and ethical consideration**

The participants were made aware of the study objective. They were assured of the confidentiality of the information collected. Along with demographic information, written consent was obtained from the participants. This has also been approved by ethical committee of College of Education and Behavioral Sciences for the protection of

participants of the study. The interview and FGD sessions were held in Afan Oromo (the local language) and audio-recorded. In-depth interview sessions lasted 30 to 45 minutes on average. An FGD session lasted for maximum of 2:00 hours. Transcription of information was done from the audiotape records and then translated into English language. The researchers interchangeably checked for meaning consistency as they are speakers of both Afan Oromo and English languages. A professional in Afan Oromo & a linguist had checked the translation outputs.

### **3.6 Methods of data analysis and interpretation**

The method of thematic categorization and connecting strategies (including narrative analysis and individual case studies) were used to analyze the responses. It included narrative analysis of the data. Using coding system to keep the anonymity of the sources (interviewees), the data collected were categorized, arranged and analyzed following the theoretical framework considered as economic, social and psychological dimensions of the return migrants' reintegration. This approach helped to identify the dimension of reintegration in which the return migrants had relatively succeeded or had failed. Certain data were also analyzed immediately as obtained in order to avoid missing of some perceived behavioral impressions that the interviewee had reflected during face-to-face interview sessions.

## **4.RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

The narratives of the participants' report were explained in line with the theoretical framework set as economic, social, and psychological dimensions of reintegration.

### **4.1 The condition of the return migrants' economic reintegration**

The data generated from the participants indicated variations among the return migrants in their economic condition. An interviewee (in the session held on 22/12/2019) from Shirka district stated that her husband had properly used the money she had sent when she was abroad. She said that he had purchased livestock for their future life, and built residential house. Although he (her husband) expected of her more money by the time she returned back, he understood and accepted that she was forced to return back with no preparation. Besides, her relatives supported her as much as they could. In the interview held on the same date, she said, “Specially my brother took one of my child with himself and still he covers all school fees and other expenses expected of me.” They contributed grain and home materials whenever she faced shortage of consumption materials. She stated that her living status was relatively at medium level compared the average living status of people in the area.

Another interviewee from Shirka district reported that she had a plan to run her own business (fattening, dairy and poultry farming), but expected loan from the local financial institutions. In an interview session held on 22/12/2019, she reflected her aspiration for getting training saying: “I wish I’ll get training in the area of livestock breeding, fattening and poultry.” Return migrants with such plan entrepreneurial initiative could easily be reintegrated if they get financial support and training. This goes with the idea in Kuschminder (2017) that economic reintegration is regarded as employment status of the returnees and their ability to afford living expenses; and possibilities of entrepreneurial activities and local investments. The return migrant explained that her family and relatives backed her economically and motivated her to think about her future positively. In response to the question of any support from government or other institutions, the interviewee responded that the support she got with her team from Arsi University helped and encouraged her and her team members to feel confident to start business. In the interview held on the same date, she said “If other organizations also are willing to extend

some support upon the seed money and training Arsi University offered, our capacity will be increased to win our livelihood expenses and make our future bright.”

Contrary to the above interviewee’s case, the third interviewee from the same district had suffered from difficulty in winning livelihood right from the days of her return from the country of migration. Her husband had died of car accident, and the husband’s family ignored her. They controlled her husband’s property including the money she had sent to him. She reported that she presented appeal to court for insurance payable as insurance to her husband’s death and she was paid after going through a difficult legal procedure. However, she had finished the small amount of money she was paid from insurance company for daily consumption, and she was suffering from shortage of money to afford livelihood. The other interviewees from the same district reported similar situation that they were temporarily engaged in retailing a sort of consumer articles for daily livelihood earnings. However, they had the idea that if they get aid and interest free loan they were ready to work hard to win their economic problem. Alternatively, they indicated their desire to be trained on computer and related skills to be engaged in service rendering job in the area. They knew that to be self-employed in-service job, it required training and material support.

Another disadvantaged return migrant reported that when she had returned back after three years of stay in the migration country, she did not get a coin from her husband although she had sent to him what she had earned. The only chance she had was to accept what happened to her and remain with her poor children. She further stated that the following year she faced additional problem - her husband was convicted criminally and was verdict of a two year prison. She was responsible to shoulder the entire burden without any support. Her parents (mother and father) were too old and they themselves needed support from her. She expressed her painful and scare feelings as “It is my 40 days fate declared for me from Allah when I was in my mother’s womb, Alhamdulillah.” All the participants reported that they had sent money to their family for two major reasons.

Firstly, they had no legal right to use financial institutions for saving their earnings in the host country. Secondly, they believed their family (parents/husband) save their money or execute migrants' planned actions. However, upon return, the majority of the return migrants could not get the money they had sent. Some of them responded what was similar to the report in IOM that the return migrants were sending money to home country not only for saving but also for supporting their poor family to use for daily household consumption. However, they said, the return was sudden and it negatively affected the livelihood of the return migrants' families. Therefore, the difficulty to save money both in the host country and in the home country, and the sudden and forced return (or job insecurity) challenged return migrants' reintegration process.

In the FGD sessions held with participants from Shirka district, the discussants complained that other than organizing them, neither the government nor non-government agency had supported them in getting loan from financial institutions. Although they counted years waiting for facilitating access to credit, they said they had hope and "The future will be bright and we can create employment opportunity in our own community; the good thing is we returned back safely to our country." Before their migration to Saudi Arabia, they had known each other for a long period of time and had friendly relationship and they were helping one another. After they had returned back, they resumed their intimacy and unity to support each other economically. They reported that some of them had started fattening (of oxen, sheep, and goats. The FGD members further said that some of the economic crises of the return migrants were related to the personality characteristics of individuals. As they narrated, one of their friends had married a migrant man abroad and gave birth to one child there. She kept her earnings with him but her husband could not give her back by the time she was expelled unexpectedly; he concealed and kept the money with his own family.

Exceptionally, a few return migrants were well integrated. A returnee (at Kore district) responded that up on her return, she did not encounter any problem because her family

welcomed her and her husband supported her economically. She further said that her husband always stood by her and shared her interest to run business. The interviewee was optimistic about her future, and said (on interview date 18/12/2019) “I have hope of winning the current problem of money to run extended business without hesitation as my husband and I had planned.” She also said that they had discussed on how to win the hardship and decided to work on vegetable plantation on plots of land they secured in contract and on the plot given from their parents. She also stated (on the same date) her bright future as “Our aim is to build house in a nearby town so as to run our business in a better way.” Obviously, it is possible to state that the better economic condition and bright future was because of the social harmony of her family.

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#### **4.2.2 The situation of the return migrants’ Social reintegration**

The majority of the return migrants had reported that they faced the problem of social reintegration because of their economic failure. Some of the return migrants in the FGD session at KORE district had indicated that their social acceptance before migration had been better than that of after they had returned back from abroad. They explained that the failure of their reputation was partly because of the society’s outlook; “... they call us ‘Diaspora’, considering that we have a lot of money; and when we are wondering here and there to look for job, they label us as greedy who run to obstruct their chance.” However, for some of the return migrants, the reputation they had before migration had been retained after return. One of the interviewees had reported that she had been a member of ‘Iddir’- a sort of local association - in the community before migration; when she returned back, the members of the ‘Iddir’ welcomed her and extended love and encouraged her to be a member of the ‘Iddir’. She further said, even they appointed her as team leader of the ‘Iddir’. She stated that there was no differed encounter that affected her social acceptance as a return migrant.



It was observed that there are important social values in the study area that dictate citizens to welcome a person to be reintegrated in the community. Most of the interviewees in Kore district commenting on the situation of their reintegration in terms social life, replied that in Arsi's clan culture, every member has friends of same sex known as "*ganga*" (a clan's informal group) instituted to help group members during social problems that could happen and became beyond the member's capacity to resolve. They said, the "*ganga*" welcomed them as they heard that they were forced to return back from abroad and advised them to be strong to overcome all the hardship they had encountered. In another FGD session (Shirka district), the participants reported similar situation. They stated that according to the tribe they belonged to, friends were the wives of their husbands' brothers and near relatives of the husbands. These friends had strong association known by the name "*ganga*" which is culturally established to support the group members during social crisis by contributing material and food substances, like, flour, grain etc. They confirmed, therefore, such bondage was strict and cannot be easily broken and did not allow members to isolate the return migrants. Social institutions like "ganga" had strong social base to help them feel relaxed and let them easily mix with the community to resist the crisis they had encountered. The discussants stressed that they trusted the community for forethought of their better future. The social norm of the "ganga" as reflected in the opinion of the FGD participants goes directly with the idea stated in (IOM, 2017) that cultural values of the society would allow return migrants' acceptance with family and friends; participation in the existing social institutions, relationship forums, and social reintegration in general.

The social construct of the community members in the area helped the return migrants in the reintegration process. The contribution of family, relatives and friends of most of the return migrants had helped the migrants to get out of depression they had suffered from because of unexpected return to home with bare hand from abroad, a condition that jeopardized their original intension of migration. One of the interviewees (Kore district) asserted that her family and relatives built positive feeling of herself and supported her in

getting the job she was engaged in by the time of the study. Another interviewee at the same district also stated that she was easily accepted by the community upon her return from abroad. She said, most of the community members' outlook was good; they welcomed her and embraced her socially except mockery name callings like 'Diaspora' from a few individuals. The interviewee opined that there was a public opinion that anyone who had worked abroad earns a lot of money, and returns back with a lot of dollars. The reality behind this was that there were earlier return migrants who had succeeded in migration and helped their family, and returned back with considerable amount of money to make their own business. This was the hearsay which was misleading the local community. Another interviewee (Shirka district) explained that when she came back from abroad, she was not scared and did not feel isolated in the community; most of the neighborhoods advised her to avoid feeling of distress and back biting. She also reported that upon her return the community understood her problem, and invited her to participate in 'Iqub' - informal association for saving money - and gave her the first chance to receive the money to start a business.

Reintegration failure was worsened when the social life condition was affected right at family level. A return migrant reported that her husband had no trust in her as he misunderstood her that she had hidden money with her parents. She said, "I feel sick of my husband's frequent nagging because of his suspicion that I had sent money to my parents although the only person to whom I had sent my earnings was my husband himself." Unless there is intervention for such misunderstandings, the family could be liable to disintegration. The community and social institutions should scrutinize and facilitate support to such victims who had family-based obstacles but systematically hidden. There could exist some abnormal social situations in which some strange family members go out of the values of the society. Such a case goes with the theory of individual differences characterizing the personality of either the returnees themselves or the returnees' family and relatives.

#### **4.2.3. The situation of the return migrants' psychological reintegration**

Basically, the economic and social situations determine the psychological state of the return migrants. In this regard, the return migrants' psychological reintegration was explored from their lived experience. An interviewee (Kore district) reported that she had no bad feelings after return, other than the head ach she seldom had by the time she remembered the hardship she had encountered in the country of migration. The interview reported her experience in the host country in grief. She said: "When I was abroad, I was suffering from difficulty to speak and understand the employer's language; I had the rumor that other migrants were thrown down from flats because of misunderstanding of what their employers ordered them." She said she was shocked frequently whenever the employer loudly spoke to her and had the fear that one day she could be thrown through window. She expressed her feeling of freedom from the worry, and positively accepted her return back home.

All the interviewed return migrants reported that failure of their mission to migrate had seriously affected their feelings. However, they had hope and positive feeling about their future although they expected much from the community and the government. One of the interviewees (Kore district) said, "Before migration, my aim was to raise my living status, but I could not succeed; the failure I faced shocked me, and I felt hopeless; but now, I decided to ignore the gloomy thought and started to think about better future and my hope is renewed." She stressed that she started to work hard to achieve her past intension; and she expected support from government and other aid granting organizations. She expressed her motivation saying "Insha-Allah, I will reach to my previous plan that forced me to migrate."

Some of the return migrants had serious traumatic experience related to their own family. An interviewee (Kore district) explained that she had married before migration, and had a daughter of 7 years old. Up on return, she knew her husband was killed by outraged

groups. Since then, she suffered from mental sickness. Her husband's parents had used the money she had sent to her husband to save. She said "I tried to bring the case to court, but because of judge's biased stand for his clan support, not for justice, I was left alone and scared." In such situations like this, psychological support from relatives, community and local government is critical to the individual return migrant. Another interviewee (Shirka district) had said that in the country of migration her employer was not satisfied and was always irritated at her. She expressed her feeling saying "I was always frustrated and ashamed with my life because I could not satisfy my employer and worried about my return to home country safely let alone earning money." She added, "However, I have recovered from mental tension I encountered at abroad as my husband welcomed and supported me in all ways."

A focused group discussant (Shirka district) was asked about their existing mental wellbeing in relation to their migration, return and reintegration. They reported that the psycho-social support they got from their relatives and the community helped them to forget all the hardship they had faced at abroad. Besides, they explained, the challenges they faced in the process of migration and their traumatic experience in the migration country had empowered them to be strong psychologically after return despite life difficulties because of lack of money. They promised that their dream of earning money in the migration country could be realized in their own country. In the FGD sessions, the returnees said, they felt free, and they were proud of their coming back with no health problem. They had confidence in themselves even though they frequently mentioned their economic problem for which they had migrated. The spirit of wellness was with them and they had optimistic thinking about their improvement in the future. The psychological reintegration observed in the group is a panacea for other return migrants who suffer from traumatic experiences related to migration.

### **4.3 Return migrants' reintegration challenges related to local administration**

Some interviewees had reported that the local government agents, like Social Affairs and Micro and Small Enterprise agents had organized them to get financial support as per the directives set by the Federal Government in support of return migrants' reintegration. However, they complained that the support did not go beyond organizing. They criticized that, as opposed to the directives given, the local government did not give priority to the return migrants in all possible services. The observed situation in this regard goes with what was reported in UNIDO (2015) in that the organizers pushed return migrants aside and prioritize their own family members to get support in job opportunities and in providing loan. Another return migrant also reported that the local social affairs office issued her a plot of land during her startup of her current business. However, later on, the plot was given to a religious institution with no substitute. She complained that, together with her team members, she "knocked at all local government doors for support," but they put a requirement to get the support. She said they were required to contribute money, and they did it. However, after the members had fulfilled the criteria, the officers ignored them, and disappointingly she complained that "Even they blocked us not to enter their office." She said "We begged them to give us at least the seed money granted from Arsi University in support of reintegration; but they refused." Lastly, they quit the matter and started working on "gulit" meaning retailing some consumer goods like grains, coffee and salt. Another challenge to reintegration process was the existing infrastructure in the locality of the returnees. One of the returnees (Kore district) complained that the work she had engaged in needed continuous water and electric services, but the availability of the services were "on and off" which frequently disturbed her not to be effective in the cafeteria service she was running.

#### **4.4 CONCLUSIONS**

The finding was explained in line with the theoretical frame work set as economic, social, and psychological reintegration. The data generated from the participants indicated variations in the situation of their reintegration. A few return migrants (2 out of 32) were in favorable circumstances, and were lucky in all the three dimensions of reintegration. The majority of the return migrants (24 out of 32) were successfully reintegrated in the social dimensions of life. The socio-cultural values of the community had contributed greatly in this regard. They were involved in some businesses because of the social support from relatives and local community members. A considerable number of the return migrants (6 out of 32) were not successful in all the three dimensions of reintegration. Psychological reintegration must be highly related to their economic situation as they associated their stress to their economic problem. These were engaged in temporary business job like retailing work of consumer articles for daily livelihood earnings.

The study further indicated that the return migrants lacked attention and nurturing from the local government. The majority of the return migrants were not successful in reintegration. The local government had weak administrative structure, poor coordination and fragile business environment, including access to financial (economic) support, job opportunity, skills training as well as psychological support. This shows that most of the return migrants were at risk economically; and it was worsened by the situation of COVID-19. The good aspect was that the return migrants, though under stress, they had strong felt dream (hope for change), and were ready to work hard to win their economic problem provided that they could get financial support in terms of credit and training.

#### **4.5 Recommendations**

The study evaluated the reintegration situation of the return migrants in terms of economic, social and psychological dimensions of their lived experience after they had returned back to their home country. In line with the conclusions reached with reference

to their reintegration in the three dimensions, the following policy implications were given.

- 1) Since the number of return migrants is increasing, and the concerned local government institutions could not support them, the policy and institutions or agencies that support on reintegration process should be revised.
- 2) Financial institutions along its systems should be evaluated or checked for their problems in rendering credit (financial) service to the return migrants. Resolution to economic-related problems is important for sustainable reintegration of migrants and minimizing pushing factors to inhibit or at least lessen tendencies towards a new cycle of migration.
- 3) The support to be rendered by the local community, local government bodies working on social affairs, and community service renders should be in all the economic, social (including training and health service), and psychological aspects of the return migrants' reintegration process.
- 4) Women, in general, and the return migrants, in particular, have to value themselves as human, and have commitment to get organized, fight for their right to benefit from existing opportunities and work to improve their livelihood in their own country.

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