Managing Irregular Migration in Ethiopia: A Case for Policies Centering the Right to Development

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Abstract

Recent years witnessed concerted bilateral and multilateral efforts to reduce irregular migration. Based on fieldwork conducted in Atsbi Wenberta, Tigray and *Wereda* 7 Addis Ketema Sub-City, Addis Ababa, we argue that the existing policy measures are based on a deficient understanding of the migration process. Firstly, migrants from Ethiopia are considered as mechanically responding to 'greener pastures' elsewhere. This focus on structural explanations of migration ignores agency of individual migrants and the impact of established norms on decision making in some localities. Secondly and more importantly, we argue that extant policies are geared towards ensuring basic socio-economic needs- negative freedoms. Based on this framework, we argue towards a comprehensive understanding of determinants of migration and policy making, which puts the migrant and her/his agency at the center of the analysis. Accordingly, we propose the advancement of migration policies and interventions which are centered on the right to development.

Key words: Migration, Ethiopia, right to development

Introduction

Migration emerged to be among the leading global policy issues of the young 21st century. Indeed, economic and security concerns of mass immigration adds further momentum to the anti-immigrant authoritarian populist view in the West, with the conspicuously visible political consequences (Galston 2018; Scoones et al. 2018). There are persistent voices calling for a global solution to these global issues (see for example Lagarde 2015). Major international organizations seem to heed this call, which in Africa is expressed in the outfit of the Khartoum Process, the Valetta Action Plan and the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF for Africa). The EUTF aims to "address the root causes of destabilization, forced displacement and irregular migration by promoting resilience, economic opportunities, equal opportunities, security and development" (European Union 2016: 1). The most comprehensive and most recent of such an attempt resulted in the signing of the world's first Global Compact for Safe,

Orderly and Regular Migration which was adopted on 10 and 11 December 2018 in Marrakech, Morocco (UN 2018). Despite the non-binding nature of the Global Compact and the document's reaffirmation of the sovereign rights of signatory countries, populist groups took the opportunity to counter the initiative leading to withdrawals from the process (Ardittis 2018).

This resistance is not coincidental and is inherent to the politics of contemporary international development. Despite the discourse of globalization and integration in circulation of ideas and goods, recent decades have been characterized by an "unprecedented global 'lockdown' of the world's poor… accompanied by the growing surveillance and policing of all forms of international circulation" (Duffield 2010: 62-63; see also Fasil 2017). The strategy is mainly premised on the "*containment* of the human manifestations of underdevelopment" (Duffield 2010: 63, *emphasis in original*), through the instrumental use of discourses of sovereignty.

The implication of this politics of international development is further magnified by increasing inequality, both within nations and between developing and developed nations, especially if China is not in the picture. Assuming zero international migration, from the perspective of global distribution of income the accident of where one is born determines her/his income level, with effort and skill making little difference (Milanovic 2015). What could be presented as a "hidden cost" of such a divide to the global economy is the lived experience of "los[ing] out on enormous economic gains in *lifetime* opportunity" for young men and women in developing countries (Clemens 2016, *emphasis in original*). Despite the immense 'hidden cost' to the global economy, estimated in trillions of dollars per year, different policy (and natural) barriers maintain the divide and the large international differences in labour prices (Clemens Montenegro and Pritchett 2016).

Migration then becomes one alternative to reduce world poverty, as it has also been in the past centuries (Ibid.). Politically charged resistance to migration reduces the chances of this happening. The alternative then becomes advancing development support (such as Valetta Action Plan, EUTF). These however will only serve the interest of the destination country, by "*reproduce[ing]* and *maintain[ing]* the generic biopolitical divide between development and underdevelopment" (Duffield 2010: 66). What Duffield (2010: 56) calls 'life-chance divide'— i.e., "the officially endorsed basic-needs approach to self-reliance in the

south" contrasted with "much higher levels of social protection and infrastructural support characteristic of mass consumer societies"—in effect is reified and unquestioned in the process. Then the mass migrations of the early 2010s, which triggered European (and the world's) attention to the issue, will only constitute one expression of the "constant" and "monotonous" rediscovery of poverty as a threat to (European) security, and the interventions serve as technologies of security (Duffield 2010).

This 'rooting' of interventions aimed to stem irregular migration counter the now recognized, but still contested, right to development (see Mesenbet 2010). The UN Declaration on the Right to Development (UN 1986) states that "The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized" (Article 1, Paragraph 1). From the very beginning developed countries' were against such rights, and developing countries pushed the Declaration with full force (Mesenbet 2010). In the Declaration, development is conceptualized in the broader sense, not in the narrow materialistic sense. Moreover, the duty bearers are states, both individually and collectively.

A serious implementation of the Right to Development in the case of management of irregular migration would mean that potential migrants are fully supported and capacitated to lead the lives they see worthwhile. It will not mean giving enough support just to keep the 'poor' where they are. This deficiency in the latest rounds of migration policies, similar to that of past migration regulation policies (Castles 2004a; 2004b; Czaika, and. de Haas 2011), we argue will likely lead to missing the target: as it does not aim to address the root cause of migration in a more comprehensive manner. We propose that the solution lies in designing and implementing policies which center on broader understandings of development as a human right.

We advance this position by adopting a framework which puts the sending countries and the agency of migrants at the center of analysis of determinants (Castles 2004a; 2004b; Czaika and de Haas 2011; de Haas 2007; 2010; 2011; 2014). We build on recent developments in theorization of migration (the aspiration-capability model) which gives due emphasis to micro level actors and processes, while not ignoring meso- and macro- level determinants (de Haas 2011; 2014), and

understandings of the 'future as a cultural fact' (Appadurai 2013). The paper finally recommends that the right to development should be an integral part of the policy to manage irregular migration.[i]

Methodologically, this paper is based on fieldwork in Tigray regional state, particularly Atsbi Wenberta *Wereda* (district) of Eastern Zone, and Addis Ababa, particularly *Wereda* 07 of Addis Ketema Sub-City. These *Weredas* were selected for the study as they are among the migration hotspot areas in the regional state and city government, respectively.[ii] The fieldwork in Tigray lasted for a month (in January and October 2017), with two weeks being in Atsbi Wenberta, and the fieldwork in Addis Ketema (in January and October 2017) During this period, thirteen key regional officials were interviewed in Mekelle, nine key informants were interviewed from the Atsbi Wenberta *Wereda* administration, elders and religious leaders, and seven FGDs were conducted with various sections of the youth, including the unemployed (separately for men and women), returnees (separately for men and women), migrants' parents, and University/College Graduates. In Addis Ketema sub-city, ten key informants from sector offices working to mitigate irregular migration were interviewed. Moreover, fourteen individual interviews and four FGDs were undertaken with returnees and potential migrants in the same sub-city of Addis Ababa. Available documents on efforts the respective *Wereda* administrations exerted to document the extent of, and reduce, irregular migration from their respective locations was also reviewed.

The remainder of this paper has four parts. The first reviews the literature on migration and development linkages and migration theories. The second reviews the literature on Ethiopian migration in broad strokes. The third section presents findings from our fieldwork, covering both migration decision making and strategies followed by the government to reduce irregular migration. The last section concludes the paper by highlighting the need to have a broader understanding of development as an inalienable human right in relevant migration policies and interventions.

Regulating International Migration: Theoretical Considerations

Mass migration to Europe has led to an increasing international cooperation to reduce irregular migration. These policy interventions are based on some theoretical considerations, human rights concerns of migrants and securitized discourses in destination countries. Theoretical considerations of migrants being pushed by poverty has led to increasing humanitarian and development aid flowing to major origin countries, among others in such forms as the EUTF. Reported cases of human rights violations and loss of life en route and in transit countries also made human rights an integral part of the negotiations leading to the Global Compact (see UN 2018). Combined with the rise of the extreme right in Europe, the view of the migrant as threatening the economic, political and social security of the European countries has led to adoption of strict border control policies, for example by the Europe's externalizing of its borders (Hyndman and Mountz 2008). This section presents the debate in the literature on various issues guiding/contributing to these policy interventions.

The academic debate on international migration has for the most part been limited to empirical explanations, with 'inert' theoretical debate hooked to the old 'push-pull' factors and gravity models (and subsequent structural explanations) (for a critique see Bakewell 2010; de Haas 2007; 2010; 2011; 2014). The bulk of this literature took potential migrants as mechanically responding to wage or pay differentials across a certain geographical divide, as if they are 'goods' lacking perceptible agency (de Haas 2011; 2014).

The rise in irregular migration to Europe and failure of available policy tools to respond to the perceived political and social challenges coming with hosting migrants triggered a systematic examination of the migration phenomenon. In this (re-)examination, agency of migrants is starting to hold a central position in analysis of determinants and policy study biases favoring recipient countries are being rectified (Castles 2004a; 2004b; Czaika and de Haas 2011; de Haas 2007; 2010; 2011; 2014). Following this line of inquiry and aiming to contribute to this debate, our conceptual framework builds on this emerging trend, particularly works based on extensive and systematic theoretical and empirical investigation coming out of University of Oxford's International Migration Institute (IMI), the aspiration-capability framework (see de Haas 2011; 2014). We complemented this framework with anthropological perspectives to future making (Appadurai 2013).

Migration in the areas we studied, as in other areas where there is dominance of irregular migration, is instrumental. It has no intrinsic value to the cohort of young Ethiopian men and women we are concerned about here. The instrumentality of migration is related to their future making project, as part of their transition into adulthood. Our analysis, thus, commences with the understanding that the future is a cultural fact, taking the analytical framework developed by Appadurai (2013: 285-300). This is based on the conception that (irregular) international migration is only one choice in the menu of alternatives the young have, and that the decision to migrate (or to stay) is context bound, most importantly the existing perversity of the 'culture of migration' (Cohen 2004) in the study districts. Adopting this understanding enables us to question the 'technicality' and 'superiority' advanced by development planners and practitioners. We argue that such interventions are deeply political and cultural, not value-free, and interventions are facilitated by backing of (administrative, financial, expertise, logistical…) power to determine the futures of the 'development subjects', in our case by attempting to inhibit the decision to migrate without giving a viable alternative future in return.

Future production will be understood following what Appadurai (2013: 286) called the "three notable human preoccupations that shape the future as a cultural fact … imagination, anticipation, and aspiration."[iii] Articulations and imaginations of a possible future constitute only the first step towards the desired future. These need to be backed by the 'capacity to aspire,' which is lacking in the groups we are interested in. Aspiration is generally about "how cultural systems, as combinations of norms, dispositions, practices, and histories, frame the good life as a landscape of discernible ends and of practical paths to the achievement of these ends" (ibid: 292). Therefore, taking the future as the domain of anthropology requires understanding that "cultural systems also shape specific images of the good life as a map of the journey from here to there and from now to then" (Ibid.). Appadurai (2013) states that the capacity to aspire[iv] "is a sort of meta-capacity, and the relatively rich and powerful invariably have a more fully developed capacity to aspire. It means that the better off you are (in terms of power, dignity, and material resources), the more likely you are to be conscious of the links between the more and less immediate objects of aspiration" (: 188). As such the "skewed distribution" of the capacity to aspire "is a fundamental feature, not just a secondary

attribute, of extreme poverty" (: 289). It is in such constrained situations that irregular migration constitutes a valid and viable alternative to build ones 'aspirational capacity', not to be an end in itself. The aspiration to a future is not limited to migration, rather migration serves as a capability increasing detour to build the capacity to aspire to a better future in the home country.

Even this 'transit future' should be supported by imagination. Imagination plays a crucial role in what Appadurai calls the "quotidian social labor for the production of locality… an always incomplete project" (2013: 287-288), but is also crucial to "building a robust anthropology of the future" (Appadurai 2013: 288), particularly through archives. Unlike state archives' goal of enabling governmentality and supporting bureaucratized power, "personal, familial, and community archives—especially those of dislocated, vulnerable, and marginalized populations—are critical sites for negotiating paths to dignity, recognition, and politically feasible maps for the future" (Appadurai, 2013: 288). Therefore, archives, state as well as communal, are about the future as much as they are about the past. In our case, the archives of circulating information, ideas and images of the migration process and the destination country serve to further entice the young coming of age to consider irregular migration as one alternative to a future. This can be encapsulated by what one Ethiopian migrant told IRIN: "I have no future in Ethiopia… I've seen Europe on TV, and it's better."[v]

Appadurai's (2013) work is focused on how to put anthropology at the center of 'future science' in competition, or on par, with economics. The concern here is more on what archives potential migrants draw in their imagination exercise and the constraints on their aspiration. As capacity to aspire is lower in poor and disempowered communities, it is to be expected that the capacity to aspire of the communities we targeted is very limited. Here, it is argued that irregular migration comes in as a possibility of expanding their capabilities to live the aspired good life. The 'imagined' good life is therefore to be lived only after a small detour into life in the Middle East as a form of enabling one's aspirational capacities. This will then call forth a '*transit future*' in migration, thus imagination and aspiration to migrate constituting the *immediate future* to make up the limitations in capacity to aspire for the longer-term future. This will then link us to the aspiration-capability framework of De Haas (2011; 2014).

The likelihood of developing of a theory which can sufficiently and comprehensively explain migration was seriously doubted and serious attempts on theorization were taken as a futile exercise (see for example Castles and Miller, 2009). Hein de Haas attempted to re-engage in such an exercise with the hope of coming up with "a more comprehensive and convincing 'behavioural' framework of migration" (2011: 16). This attempt led to creation of an 'aspiration-capability framework', which helps avoid the unnecessarily limiting administrative/legal categorization of migration (see for example Apostolova 2015) and put the (potential) migrant's agency at the center of the analysis (de Haas 2011; 2014).

Recognizing the limitations of previous explanations of migration, de Haas (2011; 2014) argues that people migrate only if they aspire to do so and if they have the capability to do it, within the constraints placed, and opportunities offered, by structures. De Haas argues that

> an improved theoretical model of migration should: conceive migration aspirations as a function of spatial opportunity (instead of only income or wage) differentials and people's life aspirations; [and] conceive migration propensities as a function of their aspirations and capabilities to migrate (de Haas 2011: 17).

Taking migration as a function of aspirations, not just of gravitating towards where there is a better economic opportunity, will also enable us to consider other non-economic factors, including social, political and cultural, that shape people's attitude towards mobility. While irregular migration by itself needs to be supported with the necessary capability, in the manner conceptualized by Amartya Sen (1999), it could also be a capability enhancing phenomenon. So, the concern is more on freedom and choice to move or to stay, not the act itself. Therefore, migration is an inherent part of development, not an expression of failure to develop (de Haas 2011; 2014).

Explanations of migration as predominantly expression of an individual's agency within the limitations (and affordances) of structures placed by national, regional or international actors needs to accommodate meso-level explanations provided by migration networks. Given the 'migration hotspot' nature of our case study areas, considering these meso-level explanations helps us better understand how agency and behavior of potential migrants is mediated by the

presence of networks and the socio-economic impact of migration in the sending areas (see Castles and Miller 2009; de Haas 2010; 2011; Massey et al. 1998).

Amartya Sen's understanding of capability gives sufficient room to examine people's agency in relation to inhibiting/enabling structures, by passing or taking advantages of the same. As such migration "itself can be conceptualized as a form, or expression of, agency …., and not only a 'functionalist' response to spatial differentials in economic opportunity" (de Haas 2011: 18). This focus on agency does not mean ignoring or downplaying the limits imposed and opportunities presented by structures, rather the intention is to look into how different actors respond differently within the same structure. The aim is to recognize agency of the young, not to deny the influence of economic and political structures on their decisions (see O'Reilly 2012).

The understanding of capability by de Haas (2011; 2014) encompasses negative and positive liberties, in Isaiah Berlin's (1969) conceptualization. Negative liberties are about absence of limitations, constraints and barriers, while positive liberties focus more on the agency of individual actors and having the ability to make good on one's desires. Having negative liberties as such might not mean much, if an individual does not have the positive liberty to control her/his future (see Berlin 1969; de Hass 2011; 2014). This is also reflected in Amartya Sen's (1999) conception of 'development as freedom' and policy focus on empowerment. The UN Declaration on the Right to Development of 1986 and the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development Goals made the right to development part of International Law.

Over the past decade, in response to the increasing risks migrants faced and serious human rights violations and loss of life en route,[vi] increasing attention is being paid to ensure the rights (liberties) of migrants. Ensuring the rights of migrants along the route, in transit and in destination countries is streamlined in many documents by now (see for example AU and IGAD contributions to UN 2018). Although these efforts should be condoned by themselves, one limitation arises from an exclusive focus on negative liberties. Moreover, there is no consideration of the rights of potential migrants in their areas of origin. The concern is more after the onset of migration, covering its different stages. Our argument is that this focus on rights should be expanded

conceptually to highlight the right to development of migrants and the communities they originate from.

Ethiopians on the Move: Policy Responses to Reduce Irregular Migration

Migration of Ethiopians crossing international borders is a relatively recent phenomenon, less than five decades (Fasil 2017), if we are to discount migrations to evade violent state repressions of local resistance and religious pilgrimage to across the Red Sea in earlier years (Bahru, Gebre and Kassahun 2010). The number of Ethiopians who left the country was very small in the pre-1974 period, with Donald Levine (1965) estimating them to be only 35 between 1876 and 1922 and about 20,000 between 1941 and 1974. Fasil Demissie (2017) attributes the increase in the last four decades of imperial Ethiopia to insertion of Ethiopia to global imperial projects and the dictates of having the young men and women with the right training for the bureaucracy and military. Although the numbers are debatable, all sources agree that an Ethiopian asylum seeker was a very rare thing at the time. Based on US immigration statistics, Terrazas (2007) states that only 61 Ethiopians were granted asylum in the US in the 1950s and only two in the following decade. This changed with the 1974 Revolution and the ensuing years of turmoil, civil war and political repression.

This mass outmigration of Ethiopians is not dissuaded by the relative peace and the reported high economic growth rates of the past two decades. Indeed the period with high economic growth is also matched by high regular labor migration to the Gulf (Asnake and Zerihun 2015) and other forms of irregular migration (Martini 2015). While the 'jobless growth' is one factor, increasing rural youth landlessness (Dessalegn 2018) and authoritarian leadership further contribute to hopelessness into making international (irregular) migration a valid coping strategy (Fasil 2017; Martini 2015). Migration also constitutes part of a household economic coping strategy and an indicator of social status at local levels (International Centre for Migration Policy Development 2008).

While there is disagreement on the size of Ethiopian migrants, there appears to be a general agreement that they are pushed by a host of economic and political factors (see for example Anbesse et al. 2009; Asnake and Zerihun 2013; Fasil 2017; Martini 2015; Solomon G. 2016).

While the migration itself is described as trafficking and smuggling, abuses and human rights violations en route and at destination countries are also recorded in the literature (see for example Anbesse et al. 2009; Asnake and Zerihun 2015; Jamie and Anwar 2017; Zack and Yordanos 2016). Increasing feminization of Ethiopian international migration especially to the Gulf is also visible (Jamie and Anwar 2017).

The Ethiopian government also became aware of the economic potential and political implications of the sizeable Diaspora population and started formal state-Diaspora relations over the past decade and half (Solomon H. 2016; Solomon G. 2016). While there are active, concerted efforts to formalize and get a greater share of the remittances, which already contributes significantly to the national economy, outperforms export earnings and foreign direct investment flows to Ethiopia, through formal channels (Asnake and Zerihun 2018), the establishment of the Ethiopian Diaspora Trust Fund is the latest strategy to mobilize resources from the diaspora.[vii] Skilled diaspora have also played key roles in the establishment and running of crucial institutions, such as the Agricultural Transformation Agency and the Ethiopian Commodity Exchange Market, and through skill transfer (primarily in the heath sector) (Solomon H. 2016).

Despite the obvious gains at household and macro-economic levels, the political implications of such a huge migrant population of Ethiopian origin is seen as a challenge. The first stark warning was during the hotly contested 2005 elections, a time when the diaspora supported the local opposition parties financially, diplomatically and through ideas (Lyons 2007). Fast reaching and circulation of news/images of various human rights abuses, including the executions by ISIS in April 2015 in Libya and xenophobic attacks in South Africa, have had their fair share to push for state interventions. Furthermore, the harsh treatment of and mass-deportation of about a hundred sixty thousand Ethiopians from Saudi Arabia in late 2013/early 2014 was a main push to ban all labor migration to the Gulf states (Asnake and Zerihun 2015).

The adopted policy interventions could broadly be put in four categories: (1) awareness raising of the youth, (2) securitizing and criminalizing the 'facilitation' role by individuals who are conventionally called 'brokers' but known as 'traffickers' by the government (Proclamation No. 909/2015); (3) job creation for the youth through the extension of various technical, financial and other supports to micro- and small-enterprises (MSEs) (see for example Ministry of

Urban Development and Housing, 2016); (4) bilateral and multilateral engagements to reduce barriers to regular migration and ensure the rights of Ethiopian migrants.

These efforts have failed to effectively deal with the challenge of irregular migration in Ethiopia, which could be attributed to a range of misconceptions. For example, although the rationale for awareness creation works is the assumption that the young do not have information on the risks and dangers of irregular migration, potential migrants have detailed and *real-time* information on risks along different routes.[viii] In dealing with 'brokers', it should be acknowledged that most of these men are locally respected and wanted, and as such it is the community itself which shields them from the law.[ix] The MSE scheme has largely failed to reduce youth unemployment, let alone contributing to the structural transformation of the economy, for a range of structural and procedural bottlenecks (Di Nunzio 2015). The multilateral engagements form part of the sub-regional, continental and global migration compact. Bilateral engagements mainly relate to outlining the operational procedure in training and sending and ensuring the rights of Ethiopian labour migrants to the respective countries, and the duties of the sending and receiving countries and the employment agency in ensuring the migrants' rights (see Asnake and Zerihun 2015).

As we will demonstrate below, the failure of policies dealing with irregular migration is attributable to the exclusive attention to structural macro factors (thus ignoring the interests and agency of potential migrants) as drivers of migration, and the focus on ensuring negative freedoms, a low standard for the aspiring youth. Based on fieldwork in Atsbi Wenberta, Tigray and Addis Ketema, Addis Ababa, we make a case for a more comprehensive understanding and policy of migration, following the conceptual framework provided in the previous section.

Extent and Drivers of Migration and Policy Responses in Ethiopia

The case study areas selected are migration hotspot *Weredas*, located in Addis Ketema Sub-City in Addis Ababa and Eastern Zone in Tigrai regional state. *Wereda* 07 of Addis Ketema sub-city, is home to numerous poor urban dwellers mostly engaged in the informal economy. Atsbi Wenberta *Wereda* located on the eastern escarpment of Tigray's mountains cascading to the Rift Valley, is selected as the

second research area. Atsbi Wenberta is home to old churches, which serve as tourist attractions now, but serve as indications of the fact that the area has been settled and farmed for millennia. With this comes the obvious consequence of land degradation, fragmentation of holding, very small land holdings and low productivity. Moreover, as the last comprehensive land redistribution in Tigray was decades ago the majority of the youth could only access land through inheritance. As such, there is a severe youth landlessness in the study area. This general agrarian situation makes agriculture less of an option to any young man raised in the area.[x] In both areas migration is aspired by the youth as a life path and hence is normative.

The government of Ethiopia is working on expanding access to education around the country. The federal and regional governments have also worked successfully to increase the coverage of primary and secondary schools over the past two decades in both *Wereda* 7 of Addis Ketema sub-city and Atsbi Wenberta *Wereda*. This has been followed by a commensurate increase in the number of new students entering higher institutions of education and the number of public universities over the past decade nationally (for general performance of the education system see Ministry of Education, 2010; 2015). Thus, for the youth 'finishing school' or 'joining/completing college' is much easier than their counterparts a generation ago.

This however did not bring some 'brightness' to the futures of the youth in the two study areas, as it is increasingly difficult to follow the 'conventional path' of 'finish college and get employed'.[xi] The education system itself cannot absorb every student into higher education, nor is that desirable. According to Head of Tigray's TVET Office, the great majority of students, some 80 % according to plan, are expected to join TVETs, rather than a University.[xii] In practice close to 88 % of 10th grade students from Tigray region do not make it to joining a University.[xiii] The next best alternative they have is joining a Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) Center, where intake capacity is still limited.[xiv] Graduating from either a University or a TVET institution does not necessarily guarantee gainful employment, however. The Ethiopian economy could not cope and create job opportunities to the young men and women joining the labour market every year.

The government is attempting to solve this through the promotion of establishment and operation of MSEs, particularly after the

identification of youth unemployment as a major challenge after the 2005 elections (Eyob 2017). What became apparent over the past decade is that doing a successful business as an MSE operator is a challenge, and that many fail to graduate to the next capital ladder. This is even the case in Addis Ababa where there is a higher effective demand (Di Nunzio 2015), let alone in Atsbi Wenberta and other rural parts of Tigray (see also Fana and Beyene 2017; Firehiwot and Kiya 2017). This leads the youth to indefinite periods of 'stillness' dominated by feelings of being 'stuck'; where life does not change. This is in line with what Mains, Hadley and Tessema say about unemployed young men in Jimma. They argue that the young men have "overabundant amounts of unstructured time in the present, and they have difficulty constructing narratives in which they are progressing toward a desirable future. They want their lives to improve with the passage of time, but they have little faith that this will occur" (2013: 113). If they are to stay closer to home, the youth do not have hope for a good future. They have lost hope in making the transition into adulthood with all its economic and emotional expectations and implications.[xv] As Mains' (2012) book title captures the repeated phrase, to the youth, 'hope is cut'. In the words of one young man from Atsbi Wenberta,

> At my age (17), dreaming about the future is the norm. But we have no future here. What will I become if I stay? Will I go back to my parents' village and be a farmer? I do not want to do that. I know that I cannot make a good living in town, because there are no good jobs, I do not have (employable/demanded) skills and I do not have family/relatives in good places to help me. So, how can I expect tomorrow to be better than today? Each day I live is the same as the previous, and with that comes anger and hopelessness.

Frustration and losing hope for the future also characterize the life of the youth in *Wereda* 7 of Addis Ketema sub-city. They have decided that Addis Ababa cannot offer their basic needs even if they are willing to let go the 'good life'. University graduates that fail to get jobs have made young people to be wary of education as a way out of poverty. Very low wages discourage them from getting employed as the money earned is far lower than necessary to cover the ever increasing cost of life in the city.

Migration becomes part of the youth's future-making project as they perceive that their dreams are unachievable within the realms of opportunities available for them in Ethiopia. This is mediated by how societies evolve. Key informants consulted in most migration prone area of Addis Ababa—Addis Ketema sub-city, *Wereda* 7—maintain that achieving the good life is bounded by one's success to migrate and finding a job that pays in the Middle East. They expect these migrants to pursue ambitious goals after their return. Nonetheless, many are aware that at least in the short term they will only be able to sustain the needs of their family, as the following quote from a key informant tells:[xvi]

> At the moment, the life I am living is deprived of the basic needs that one needs for survival. I live in a very small house along with my parents, my brother and my three children. Our house is very much congested making us live a poor quality life. I would like to travel to one of the Arab countries [the Middle East] to earn better income to enable my family afford better housing, to feed them as well as to pay for my children's school fee.

The same is true for the youth in Atsbi Wenberta. The general agreement of informants is that 'there is no future' for them in the *wereda*. The futures of the youth are 'frustrated'. It is in this general sense of 'frustration' at staying back that irregularly migrating to Saudi Arabia becomes a capability increasing move. If the future is a cultural fact, it will be constructed through collective imaginations and archives and aspirations (Appadurai 2013). This leads us to the dominant communal archives and aspirations, as these relate to migration.

The imagination which drives the youth in migration hot-spot areas towards migration is the urge to flee poverty, and leading a risky subsistent life. Migrants to the Middle East do not start-off their journey with the assumption that once they reach their destination they will prosper. Such an imagination might be true among migrants who opt to travel to Europe. The journey of those migrating to the Middle East rather commences with the plan of enabling families remaining behind live a reasonably fulfilling life. Hence, the way the good life is perceived is very much in line with fulfilling basic needs such as food and shelter. It is also about appearing successful among community members, which is associated with migration in the research area.

Findings from Atsbi Wenberta and *Wereda* 7 indicate that the imagination of an individual is context specific and depends on the dominant narratives on life, and on migration, in the particular community she/he belongs to. This links to what is explained as 'culture of migration'[xvii] and migration network by scholars (Cohen 2004; Timmerman, Hemmerechts & De Clerck 2014). In such an area affected by migration, "international movement becomes so deeply rooted that the prospect of transnational movement becomes normative, and young people 'expect' to live and work in a particular foreign country at some point in their lives" (Jonsson 2008: 9). This happens, in the case of our field experience, through the manifestations, usually overt, and archives built through the experience of previous migrants.

This could happen in the form of better housing structures and consumption by family with child(ren)/relatives abroad, owning vehicles and 'big' buildings and an entire neighbourhood (dubbed Jeddah locality in Atsbi Wenberta) built with money from Saudi Arabia. Many returnees also tell stories of bravado and adventure. All this builds a very strong communal archive to draw from when a young man/woman contemplates about her/his future. As an informant in Atsbi Wenberta stressed, "what will you dream when your teacher goes to Saudi? Priests, icons in our community, also do go there, eat the Muslim meat. Therefore, we all dream to go there."[xviii] As such, in areas highly affected by longer history of international irregular migration, the imagination of a future for the young includes migrating at some point in their life. The imagination is not purely individual, rather is highly mediated by culturally accepted norms and practices. The structure of the imagined future is 'stratified' or 'sedimented': one has to make a de tour and spend a few years abroad before living the desired life.

The migration alternative is added to the menu of options to living the good life at some point in the future through meso-factors. These factors create improved access for migrants to map and facilitate their journey. Returnees consulted emphasize the role of 'brokers' in determining their destination country. 'Brokers' have networks in the origin and destination areas. These networks of migration 'brokers' or at times termed as smugglers sustain irregular migration, potentially competing with legal ways of migration. The 'brokers' in Addis Ababa are well-linked to employment agencies in the Middle East countries.

The two counterparts negotiate terms of employment and once agreed the visa issuing process will be underway. For migrants taking the land route, a strong network of brokers exist from Addis Ababa to Sudan through Metema Yohannes. The 'brokers' are the major source of information for migrants in terms of what to expect on their route and how to get by. In many instances, the brokers inflate what will be achieved once migrants reach their destination. This is to woo migrants and increase the brokers' earning. The other meso-factor offering migration as a viable option as a mechanism to live the good life is the existence of high number of migrants from the study areas in the destination country/region.

With the above in mind, it is no wonder that the 'aspiration to migrate' is high in the study areas. One can even go to the extent of stating that the 'capacity to aspire' for a well-meaning and desired future, which generally is lacking in poor communities (Appadurai 2013), is directly linked to the 'aspiration to migrate' in the study areas. Migration has the instrumental value of increasing the capacity of the youth to aspire towards a better future. Migration thus makes part of the development process, if we define development following Sen (1999) as the broadening of capabilities (see also De Haas, 2014), not a sign of victimhood.

The same factors which lead to the pervasively high 'aspiration to migrate' do also contribute to increasing the capability to migrate. Most parents encourage their children to migrate, and could even finance it. Friends, siblings, and relatives in Saudi Arabia also contribute to increasing the flow of information, ideas, and reducing the risks of reaching and working after reaching Saudi Arabia, in addition to financing migration. A very unlucky young man/woman will have to work and save for some time. There are cases also of men who joined MSEs to only access loan from a micro-finance institution as a way of financing their irregular migration.[xix] Low capability in effect does not limit oneself from migrating; the potential migrant will only has to work towards increasing her/his capability to the aspired migration.

As a way of stemming ever growing irregular migration, three major strategies are employed in the study areas (and broadly in Ethiopia too): creation of jobs through MSEs, regularising labour migration, and preventing irregular migration. Policies which intend to deal with out-migration in Ethiopia are Proclamation on Overseas Employment (Proclamation 923/2016); Micro and Small Enterprises Strategy of 2011;

National Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) strategy of 2008; and Proclamation to provide for prevention and suppression of trafficking in person and smuggling of migrants (909/2015). In this regard, promotion of Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) is upheld through the provision of trainings, credit, work premises and Business Development Support. It has been over a decade since the government adopted the MSE scheme to augment employment opportunities. The scheme was further emphasized after the MSE strategy was designed, and reports allege that hundreds of thousands of jobs have been created. For example, over a five year period (2010-2015), the total number of jobs (per sector) created were 114,455 in the manufacturing sector, 392,708 in the construction sector, 115,515 in the service sector, 62,635 in urban agriculture sector and 45,589 in trade in Addis Ababa. In addition, returnees formed 291 enterprises creating jobs for 1,272 people (Addis Ababa Micro and Small Enterprises Development Bureau 2016).

The achievement of MSEs in reducing the accelerating flow of migrants from different parts of Ethiopia is very much restrained by a number of factors. In Addis Ketema, most unemployed youth are interested to start businesses within the sub-city as the location is well-suited for trade. It is a very busy area and small businesses can easily thrive. Nevertheless, there are no work premises in the sub-city. An informant from Addis Ketema sub-city mentioned that the assumption was that MSEs will be able to graduate into medium level enterprises and invest in building work premises within five years and hence hand over sheds initially provided to them to new entrants. Moreover, the finding of an ethnographic research conducted by Di Nunzio (2015) shows the income earned by successful enterprises is not better than what the informal labor market offers which is 30-40 USD per month. A 32 years old female returnee from Saudi Arabia had the following to say about government support:

> I recently returned from Saudi Arabia following the country's warning that all illegal migrant workers will be deported. Despite the warning I was not willing to return as I was well-aware of the labour market situation in Ethiopia. I knew that I will not be able to find a job which enables me to cover my family's needs. However, the Ethiopian government promised us that we will get better job

> opportunities through the Micro and Small Enterprises scheme. This is what influenced my decision to return to Ethiopia. Now, I have found out that it was all deception. We were even unable to obtain our preferred training opportunities. For example, I wanted to get training opportunity in either cooking or trade. But, the government is saying we should be trained in poultry because there are not work premises in Addis Ketema sub-city.

One can argue that structural failure to provide the youth with decent income to sustain their day to day lives denies them off their capacity to aspire. Many of the informants consulted prefer to live within their own locality. They say one can freely move around when she/he is in her/his own country. Living in the Middle East comes with a lot of hustle. The prospective migrants have heard of unfriendly employers who force migrant labourers to flee, leaving behind their passports and are forced to live and work illegally. Being able to live with family is also a motivating factor to stay in Ethiopia. However, the lack of plausible livelihood/economic alternatives at home pushes them to the unwanted but seemingly necessary path of migration.

Policies aiming at deterring irregular out migration from Ethiopia focus on (i) awareness raising, (ii) anti-trafficking/ traffickers initiatives, (iii) employment creation, and (iv) promotion of regular migration. The government of Ethiopia is enforcing such a policy through the passing of various proclamations and establishing institutions. The MSE and TVET strategies can be cited as initiatives aiming at creation of employment opportunities in-country aiming at reduction of irregular out migration from Ethiopia. The prevention and suppression of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants proclamation (Proclamation No. 909/2015) is launched with the objective of controlling the acts of smugglers. The government promotes regular migration to deter the irregular one through the Provision of Overseas Employment Proclamation (Proclamation Number 923/2016).

Establishing an MSE and becoming successful in Ethiopia is toilsome because of insufficient access to capital, work premises and technical support. Even when MSEs are successful, very few graduate with in the set time-frame since the scheme is only enough to sustain livelihoods rather than thriving to achieve increased quality of life.

Numerous enterprises are forced to cease operation as the support provided by the government is a pretention than a genuine effort to improve lives. Informants in *Wereda* 7 of Addis Ketema sub-city talk of a shop provided for MSEs which was off-road and hence deprived of feasible market opportunities. When loans are provided for some enterprises, it is without any control and support mechanism which leads to miss-use and at times end up funding irregular migration.

The government's effort to regularize outmigration is not fully operational because of various reasons including the low capacity of institutions to enforce the proclamation and employment agencies continuing to send-off migrants using the irregular path.[xx] Even after using the regular path, migrants are forced to become irregular after reaching their destination as the regular work pays less.[xxi] Furthermore, there are no regular paths for labour migrants to travel to European countries leaving the irregular as the only option.

The government's intervention—as well as projects funded by international donor agencies—are focused on ensuring the 'negative rights' (Berlin 1969) of individuals that are likely to migrate. These interventions are fixated on how basic needs can be ensured as well as on protecting migrants from harms they may face as a result of irregular migration. Such interventions ignore the fact that migrants not only require to fulfil their basic needs rather they aim at living improved life by getting decent access to housing, health, education, etc. Hence, policies should rather aim for achieving better outcomes to the youth (and communities) prone to migration. The solution should be to empower such communities to live the lives they feel are worthy, and avoid the ghettoization of their desires to only economic subsistence. They should also be consulted as to what is missing in their life and what can be made of support from international donor agencies rather than following the "one size fits all" approach (MSE development in Ethiopia's case), which is top-down in nature.

Conclusion

The international, regional and national policies and strategies aimed to curb irregular migration are mainly meant to 'ghettoize' poverty and the poor in the world regions they originate from. These policies and strategies are not meant to promote wellbeing and improvement in the general life conditions of migrants and sending areas, rather aim to support the basic subsistence needs of potential migrants. This runs

counter to the essential desires of migrants, or any other social group, and as such most recent attempts to cut irregular migration from Ethiopia to the Middle East, Europe and South Africa are futile.

The failure mainly emanates from the deficient understanding of migration the policy interventions are based on. In this paper, we argued that the understanding of the migration decision making process should not be limited to structural, macro factors only. It should also consider the agency of the potential migrants, and the network of relationships with prior migrants in the destination countries. In cases of young men and women in migration hotspot areas, we found out that migration constitutes one of the most preferred viable pathways to a decent future.

Current attempts focus on avoiding possible transgressions on their rights. Job creation, through (mainly) MSE development scheme, is arguably designed to enable the youth lead a fulfilling life. In practice, these schemes only enable the youth to somehow subsist economically. The other interventions aim to reduce the possibilities of human rights violations en route and in destination countries. If the policy interventions are to succeed, alternatives to a 'full' future should be brought to the imaginations of the youth. This calls for the re-affirmation of commitment to the right to development, and implies that interventions should be constituted as part of commitments of states (sending, transit, destination, and others) to protecting and promoting these rights.

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Notes

[i] We use IOM's definition of irregular definition: "Movement if persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination" (see https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms).

[ii] The extent of migration varies significantly across the different *Weredas* of Tigray. For example, in 2015/16 alone a total of 10,155 (F=2,772) individuals migrated from Tigray: of these are from Central Zone (1,503 (F= 350), of whom 1,437 (F= 324) were from Ahferom *Wereda*), Eastern Zone (4,875 (F=1,361), of whom 1,216 (F=335) and 2,320 (F=691) were from Kelete Awlalo and Atsbi Wenberta *Weredas*, respectively); South

Eastern Zone (1,376 (F=371), of whom 1,428 (F= 377) were from Hintalo Wajirat *Wereda*) and Southern Zone (1,907 (F= 570), of whom 810 (F=294) and 831 (F= 202) were from Raya Alamata and Raya Azebo *Weredas*). These *Weredas* are among the top origin areas for irregular migrants from the region, and Atsbi Wenberta is among the leading migration hotspots in the region (see Fana and Beyene 2017). Similarly in *Wereda* 07 of Addis Ketema sub-city the number of migrants is said to be very high though exact figures were not accessible from the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs at the city, sub-city and *Wereda* levels. This emanates from the irregularity of migration which leaves those on the route and at destination countries unrecorded. Moreover, relevant offices are not exerting extra-effort to undertake a survey of migrants because of paucity of capacity and being busy with other assignments. Regardless, interviews conducted with returnees and potential migrants show that a significant proportion of the youth residing in the sub-city aspire to migrate or have migrated (Firehiwot and Kiya 2017).

[iii] In this paper, we did not pay significant attention to the third factor, anticipation. Anticipation is mainly about risks and dangers, unknown or known, and ways/thinking/practices of managing these and increasing "the horizons of hope, that expand the field of imagination, that produce greater equity in … the capacity to aspire" (Appadurai, 2013: 295). This of course is relevant as it relates to perceptions and evaluations of risks by different actors in the migration process (see for example, Müller-Mahn and Everts, 2013). This is outside the scope of this paper.

[iv] It is a "cultural capacity, in the sense that it takes its force within local systems of value, meaning, communication, and dissent. Its form is recognizably universal, but its form is distinctly local and cannot be separated from language, social values, histories, and institutional norm, which tend to be highly specific" (Appadurai, 2013: 290).

[v] http://www.irinnews.org/report/94279/ethiopia-cautionary-migration-tales-are-no-deterrent

[vi] See, for example, data on missing migrants and …over the past few years at the following link missingmigrants.iom.int

[vii] https://www.ethiopiatrustfund.org/

[viii] KII: Wereda 07, Addis Ketema Sub-City, Addis Ababa

[ix] Oral Presentation, Fekadu Adugna, 5 October 2018, 20th ICES, Mekelle, Ethiopia.

[x] Interview: Elders and young men, Atsbi Wenberta *Wereda*.

[xi] Interview: young men and women, Atsbi Wenberta *Wereda*.

[xii] Interview: Head, TVET Bureau, Mekelle.

[xiii] Ibid. W7

[xiv] Ibid. W7

[xv] Interview: young men, Atsbi Wenberta *Wereda*; KII: Wereda 07, Addis Ketema Sub-City, Addis Ababa.

[xvi] KII: Wereda 07, Addis Ketema Sub-City, Addis Ababa.

[xvii] This strongly relates to what Cohen (2004: 5) states in reference to 'culture of migration': first, that migration is pervasive—it occurs throughout the region and has a historical presence ….. Second, the decision to migrate is one that people make as part of their everyday experiences. Third and finally, the decision to migrate is accepted by most (locals) as one path toward economic well-being."

[xviii] Interview: young returnee, Atsbi-Wenberta *Wereda*.

[xix] Interview: experts and officials Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs and Bureau of Youth and Sports, Atbsi Wenberta *Wereda*.

[xx] KII: *Wereda* 07, Addis Ketema Sub-City, Addis Ababa

[xxi] Interview: young men, Atsbi Wenberta *Wereda*