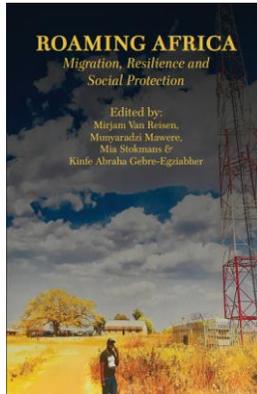


# Shattered Dreams: Life after Deportation for Ethiopian Returnees from Saudi Arabia

*Shishay Tadesse Abay*

## Chapter in: Roaming Africa: Migration, Resilience and Social Protection

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# Shattered Dreams: Life after Deportation for Ethiopian Returnees from Saudi Arabia

*Shishay Tadesse Abay*

### Introduction

Ethiopia is one of the major labour sending countries in the world and the largest refugee hosting country in Africa (ILO, 2017). Although the Ethiopian economy, as well as its population, has shown high growth in recent years, this growth has not been accompanied by a significant reduction in poverty or job creation, particularly for the burgeoning youth population (ILO, 2017). Consequently, many Ethiopians consider out-migration as the only way to achieve a better standard of living (De Regt & Tafesse, 2015). In fact, the landscape of migration from Ethiopia has changed in recent decades from that born out of conflict to irregular migration,<sup>1</sup> mainly

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*In 2013 and 2017, more than 243,000 Ethiopia migrants were expelled from Saudi Arabia, many without fulfilling their migration goals. These migrants face huge challenges in re-establishing their lives in Ethiopia. Migrants and their families usually invest huge sums of money, selling assets and taking loans, to send a family member abroad. Involuntary return exposes returnees to an unwelcome reception by their families and feelings of shame about failure, hindering reintegration and influencing returnees to re-migrate. While deportation is often seen as a logical policy to respond to increasing numbers of migrants, this chapter shows the sad reality that results from involuntary return.*

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<sup>1</sup> Migration is considered 'irregular' when it takes place outside the legal and regulatory norms of the sending, transit, and destination countries (Reitano, Adal, & Shaw, 2014).

driven by economic reasons, reflecting the dynamic nature of the issue and the factors that drive it (Zewdu, 2018; Fransen & Kuschminder, 2009). Although the exact number of Ethiopian migrants is hard to ascertain, the brutal beheading of 30 Ethiopians in Libya by Islamic State (ISIS), mass deportation of Ethiopians from Saudi Arabia, and numerous killings of Ethiopians in South Africa and Yemen reflect the magnitude of the problem (IOM, 2014).

Although Ethiopians migrate to many destinations, Saudi Arabia is one of the most popular for unskilled Ethiopian labour migrants. A report by the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS) on the trends involved in Ethiopian migration revealed that in less than five years (2012 to March 2016) around 317,136 Ethiopian migrants arrived in Yemen, mostly aiming to transit to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States (RMMS, 2016). This is substantiated by empirical evidence that estimates that about 60–70% of Ethiopians migrating to countries in the Middle East, mainly Saudi Arabia, are irregular migrants (De Regt & Tafesse, 2015). Consequently, two rounds of deportation of Ethiopians have been carried out by the Saudi Arabian government. In the first round, 163,000 irregular Ethiopian migrants were forced to return to Ethiopia after an amnesty period came to an end in November 2013 (IOM, 2014). In the second round of deportations, more than 80,000 Ethiopians were expelled from Saudi Arabia between March and June 2017, following the expiration of a 90-day grace period (IOM, 2017). Studies on the lived migration experiences of Ethiopian return migrants from the Middle East show that they are often exposed to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse during the course of their migration (De Regt & Tafesse, 2015; Abebaw, 2012; Fernandez, 2010).

Although migration to Saudi Arabia is widespread in Ethiopia, it is particularly prevalent in the Tigray region. Data from the Tigray Region Bureau of Youth and Sports Affairs and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) show that, as of June 2014, there were 30,191 returnees from Saudi Arabia in the region deported between November 2013 and April 2014. This figure accounts for

22% of the 163,000 Ethiopian deportees at the national level (Tigray Region Bureau of Youth and Sports Affairs, 2014; IOM, 2014).

In order to reduce the likelihood of remigration, it is important to develop interventions aimed at helping returnees reintegrate into Ethiopian society. However, evidence shows that migrants who return involuntarily often face huge challenges in re-establishing their lives in their countries of origin (De Regt & Tafesse, 2015; Kleist & Milliar, 2013). Furthermore, the reintegration of a sizeable number of returnees is challenging and expensive for poor countries like Ethiopia that do not have the capacity to provide regular and comprehensive assistance for returnees (De Regt & Tafesse, 2015). It has also been argued that livelihood restoration is more complicated for returnees when migration is an established household livelihood strategy, which is often realised through collective decisions and finance-pooling (Kleist & Milliar, 2013).

Scholarly works that focus on exploring the reintegration challenges of return migrants, particularly involuntary returnees, show that multifaceted issues ranging from structural issues in the place of origin (such as poverty and unemployment) to personal problems (such as disdain for local job opportunities, desire to get rich overnight and lack of skills) hinder the reintegration of returnees. A study conducted on the involuntary return of Ghanaian migrants from Libya revealed that the unfavourable mode of return, the high level of dependence by migrants' families on remittances, and unfavourable local conditions hinder the reintegration of returnees (Mensah, 2014). Similarly, findings on Basotho male return labour migrants to South Africa show how the limited human capital of returnees, lack of psychological preparedness for post-return life, and lack of support make the reintegration of returnees into their home communities problematic (Morojele & Maphosa, 2013).

To date, few studies have been conducted in Ethiopia to examine the problems Ethiopian return migrants from the Middle East have reintegrating. The overwhelming majority of studies focus on the reintegration challenges of female returnees. Research conducted by

Nisrane, Morissens, Need and Torenvlied (2017) in Addis Ababa on female return migrants from Saudi Arabia found that the migration setting (which usually impedes preparedness to return), the personal traits of the migrants, and the absence of post-return assistance were major obstacles to the economic reintegration of female returnees. In another study, the absence of post-return employment and a sustainable source of income, the deteriorating health status of returnees, their lack of capital and the lack of support from external bodies were identified as the main challenges to the successful reintegration of Ethiopian female return migrants from Saudi Arabia (Alemu, 2018). Furthermore, based on a study of 168 Ethiopian involuntarily returned migrants from Saudi Arabia (both men and women), De Regt and Tafesse (2015) found that lack of preparedness to return is the primary reason for the poor social, psychological and economic reintegration of returnees in their communities. All of these researchers confirmed that the vast majority of returnees did not achieve their migration goals and were unable to re-establish their livelihoods at home and, hence, were contemplating re-migrating. Apart from this, there is evidence that the loss of the expected gains from and goals of migration, the reception of families following deportation (Kleist & Milliar, 2013), transnational ties and networks, and socio-cultural feelings of failure held by deportees affect their reintegration (Schuster & Majidi, 2013). However, little is known as to how these factors affect the reintegration process of Ethiopian returnees deported from Saudi Arabia.

International migration is a multi-dimensional global phenomenon and has become a hot topic of debate in today's world. This is due to the fact that migration impacts on the health, security and wellbeing of people, as well as the economies of both sending and receiving countries (Jamie, 2013). This chapter seeks to further our understanding of the effects of deportation on return migrants. The argument is that the deportation of people against their will and the resultant failure of deportees to meet their migration goals, the negative reception by family members, and the socio-cultural feelings of shame about failure make the reintegration of deportees problematic, motivating remigration. Thus, the question this chapter

seeks to answer is: *What are the effects of the deportation of Ethiopian migrants from Saudi Arabia on their reintegration in the home country and remigration intention?*

The chapter is divided into nine sections including this introduction. The next two sections present a brief review of the literature on the pre-migration expectations of migrants – their dreams of a better life for themselves and their families – and the effect of deportation and returning home empty-handed. This is followed by a description of the methodology used and the characteristics of the respondents. The findings are then presented in four sections which explore the effect of the pre-migration perceptions, expectations and migration goals of returnees and their families; the negative reception of returnees by their families after deportation; the migrants' socio-cultural feelings of shame about failure; and their transnational ties and networks on their reintegration and remigration intention. This is followed by a brief discussion and conclusion.

### **Dreams of a better life**

Unlike in the 1970s, in recent years migration from Ethiopia has been mainly driven by the desire to improve livelihood and wellbeing. Despite the substantial economic growth in the country, many Ethiopians still consider migration as the only way to achieve a better standard of living (Schroder, 2015; De Regt & Tafesse, 2015; Zewdu, 2018; Estifanos, 2017). Limited employment opportunities for educated people in urban areas and the dwindling share of resources in the rural areas of Ethiopia have pushed numerous youth, and their families, to perceive migration as a short cut to liberation from poverty. Parents in rural areas appreciate having a family member abroad, despite the dangerous routes they take and the hardships they might suffer in their lives as migrant workers (Maru, 2016). Due to an inability to satisfy the basic needs of their family members and the (perceived) better living conditions of the families with migrant children abroad, parents often encourage their children to migrate (Maru, 2016; Gebre-Egziabher, Abay, Fekadu, Gebreegziabher & Kassaye, 2017; Estifanos, 2017).

In relation to this, a study conducted among migration prone communities in southern Ethiopia shows that communities have a strong positive perception of migration, and families who send their children abroad are accorded high social status in the community (Estifanos, 2017). Even in the recent past, religious leaders have encouraged parents to send their children abroad by saying that migration is something opened by God for communities to prosper and, as a result, communities organise farewell programmes to collect money for potential migrants and receive blessings from religious leaders (Zewdu, 2018; Gebre-Egziabher *et al.*, 2017; Maru, 2016; Kanko, Bailey & Teller, 2013). In relation to this, Estifanos (2017) points out that despite the challenges migrants face in the course of their migration, remittances sent back home by migrants are essential to improve the living standards of the families left behind. Hence, remittances are not only an important reason for migrating, but also an insurance for the migrant and poverty-stricken families left behind (Zewdu, 2018).

Prior to the 1970s, migration from Ethiopia was prevalent among educated and urban people in the country. However, currently, those migrating include illiterate youth from rural areas. A study done on potential migrants in the southern part of Ethiopia found that migration has become something everybody wants to try. The overwhelming majority (79%) of the research participants reported that going abroad is one of the things most youth in the community want to experience (Gebre-Egziabher *et al.*, 2017). Another study conducted on Ethiopian return migrants from the Middle East and South Africa found that 55% of the returnees do not believe that working in Ethiopia will help to change their own and their family's life for the better; similarly, 65% of returnees believe that Ethiopian youth can change their life for the better by working abroad (Minaye & Zeleke, 2017). To this end, Zewdu (2018) pointed out that among the youth in Ethiopia, migration has replaced conventional aspirations of attending school and securing government jobs. The success stories of some pioneer migrants and the physical transformation some Ethiopian migrants and their respective families

have enjoyed mask the risks of migration, blinding prospective migrants, even when the risks are explained to them (Estifanos, 2017). This emanates from the fact that prospective migrants in Ethiopia often seek out positive stories, while discounting reports of negative experiences (Busza, Teferra, Omer & Zimmerman, 2017) and migrate with a predetermined plan, namely, to send remittances back home and invest business activities upon their return (Nisrane *et al.*, 2017; Zewdu, 2018).

### **Returning empty-handed: Deportation and reintegration**

In Ethiopia, the migration of one member of a family abroad for work is often part of a household livelihood diversification strategy, essential for survival and a buffer against varied and multiple crises (Ali, 2018; Fernandez, 2011). However, realising the goals of migration is not as simple as most potential migrants expect. Despite the positive perceptions and expectations of returnees before migration, the actual migration experiences of most returnees show that the situation in destination countries is not necessarily as perceived. As a result, a state of dissonance is created due to the misalignment of the perceptions and expectations of migrant returnees before they migrate with the actual reality experienced at the destination.

It is well documented that Ethiopian migrants to the Middle East are susceptible to different abuses. Overwork, denial of food and medical treatment, withholding of their salary, salary not commensurate with workload, denial of communication, confinement and rape are some of the reported experiences faced by Ethiopian migrants in the Middle East (Abebaw, 2012; Fernandez, 2010). Although migrants experience countless forms of abuse at the hands of their employers and other actors in destination countries, they are seldom in a position to tell their families about these negative experiences. Rather, they prefer to tolerate the undignified and abusive treatment in order to achieve their migration goals (Ali, 2018), which includes remitting the money they earn back home to improve the lives of their families. A study conducted on female Ethiopian return migrants in Addis Ababa

and migrants in Kuwait revealed that the majority of the interviewed women had been remitting most, if not all, of their salaries to support their birth family (Fernandez, 2011). The sending of remittances back home on a regular basis, permits families to improve their livelihoods and social status in the community, which, in turn, leads to the development of a positive mindset about migration on the part of their families. Under such circumstances, families are generally not receptive to negative stories about the migration experiences of their children. Hence, the positive feeling families have about migration hinders their acceptance of the negative information.

Following the end of the grace period announced by the Saudi Arabian government for irregular migrants to leave the country, irregular migrants who stayed were hunted by the security forces, detained and then deported to their country of origin. During their arrest and detention, many migrants experienced innumerable violations, including the looting of their belongings, torture, denial of food and water, and sexual abuse. A study conducted on some of the deported returnees in Addis Ababa showed that, due to the sudden crackdown, many returnees were forced to leave Saudi Arabia empty-handed (De Regt & Tafesse, 2015). De Regt and Tafesse (2015) found that out of the 168 returnees surveyed, only 44.2% were able to bring back some of their belongings, but most returned empty-handed. Similarly, Kuschminder (2014) found that most Ethiopian returnees do not achieve their financial goals of migration or change their living situation in Ethiopia, as the challenges they face during migration do not allow them to do so.

The negative migration experiences of migrants not only destroy their dreams, but also have negative repercussions on the livelihoods of their families, as the primary migration objective is usually to improve the impoverished economic situation of their family and their lives upon return. Involuntary return means the end of remittances. Households in which remittances from migrants constitute the sole or largest source of income are left vulnerable (Zewdu, 2018; Kleist, & Milliar, 2013). The situation becomes worrisome if migrants or their families have fallen into debt to finance the migration process.

In his study on Ethiopian female migrants, Ali found that the end of remittances creates social tension between the returnees and their families and can lead to estrangement (Ali, 2018). The divergence between the high expectations of the families of migrants, on the one hand, and the accumulated negative migration experiences of the returnees, on the other hand, can create unpleasant relations between returnees and their families. The situation is worse if returnees are dependent on their families, causing additional strain on scarce resources.

In communities with high expectations about the economic outcomes of migration, the shame of returning empty-handed can be intense. Thus, some involuntary returnees choose to isolate themselves to avoid gossip and social degradation (Kleist & Milliar, 2013). Furthermore, migrants who were marginalised in the destination country often face stigmatisation and marginalisation in their country of origin after return (Haase & Honerath, 2016). As a result, many deportees suffer from health problems, post-traumatic stress, and depression, which may deteriorate if their families and communities do not understand or believe their negative experiences (Kleist & Milliar, 2013).

Therefore, the positive expectations of families about migration and the unwelcoming reception of unsuccessful returnees by their families are some of the challenges to the successful reintegration of return migrants (Kleist & Milliar, 2013). In some cases, local communities assume that returnees are financially better off than non-migrants in the community. This misconception can negatively affect the morale of returnees in their endeavours to reintegrate.

## **Methodology and characteristics of participants**

This chapter is based on research conducted for the author's PhD in two administrative *woredas*<sup>2</sup> of Tigray region, Ethiopia, namely: Saesie

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<sup>2</sup> A *woreda* is an administration classification in Ethiopia below the level of a zone (in decreasing order: country-region-zone-woreda-kabele) and equivalent to a district.

Tsaedaemba and Ahferom. Saesie Tsaedaemba and Ahferom are in the Eastern and Central zones of Tigray region, respectively. These zones are characterised by a history of frequent drought and the people in these zones often suffer from acute food shortages. As well as recurrent drought, the causes of food insecurity in these areas include lack of arable land, erratic rainfall, and degraded natural resources (Berhe, 2013).

As of July 2014, there were 30,192 returnees in Tigray region registered as deported from Saudi Arabia between November 2013 and April 2014 (IOM, 2014). Of these, 20,400 (or 68%) originated from the Eastern and Central zones of the region (Tigray Region Bureau of Youth and Sports Affairs, 2014). Compared to other areas in the region, these zones are hotspots of irregular migration, mainly to Saudi Arabia. Hence, from these zones, these two *woredas* – Saesie Tsaedaemba and Ahferom – were purposely selected for the study, on account of the number of deportees in each *woreda*. Finally, respondents were selected from the list provided by officials at the *kebele* (smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia) level using systematic random sampling technique.

A mixed research approach was used, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. First a survey was carried out among 218 returnees who had registered in their respective districts. The sample population encompassed deportees who were formerly residents of the districts and who had returned in the two phases of mass deportation from Saudi Arabia (November 2013 to April 2014 and March to July, 2017). The term ‘return migrant’ is used interchangeably with ‘returnee’ and ‘deportee’ in this study to refer to a person who migrated from Ethiopia to Saudi Arabia and was returned involuntarily to Ethiopia (deported from Saudi Arabia).

The survey data were collected using an interviewer-administered structured questionnaire, which was filled in by four trained enumerators. This tool was deployed in order to collect quantitative data to enrich and triangulate the qualitative data gathered. The qualitative data were collected using focus group discussions and in-

depth interviews. Two focus group discussions were held, one in each *woreda*. The participants of the focus group discussions included members of the local community, return migrants and parents of returnees. Each focus group discussion had 9–12 discussants. In-depth interviews were carried out with 15 return migrants: 6 in Ahferom and 9 in Saesie Tsaedaemba. Key informant interviews were undertaken with carefully selected representatives of offices in the study areas whose formal or informal engagement with the community gave them knowledge of the subject in question. Key informants included representatives of the Women and Children Affairs, Youth and Sport Affairs, Labour and Social Affairs offices in the study *woredas* and the Tigray Region Bureau of Youth and Sports Affairs. Guidelines were prepared for the focus group discussions, key informant interviews and in-depth interviews in English and then translated to Tigrigna, the local language of the informants. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. Four themes emerged as common to all participants after careful analysis of their responses.

Regarding the characteristics of respondents to the survey, 75.2% (n=164) were men and 24.8% women. In terms of age distribution at the time of migration, the majority of respondents 84% (n=183) were young adults aged less than 35 years with a mean age of 28 years. There were no respondents to the survey aged less than 18 years old at the time of migration. In relation to the literacy status and education level of the returnees at the time of migration, 10.1% of the respondents were illiterate, and 42.7% had achieved elementary (grades 1–8) education and 41.7% had achieved secondary (grades 9–12) level. Only 5.5% had a tertiary education.

In terms of place of residence before migration, slightly more than half (51.4%) of the respondents to the survey were from rural areas and 48.6% were from urban areas. Although previously dominated by urban dwellers and relatively educated people, the migration of rural dwellers and less educated people has become common in Ethiopia, particularly in Tigray region (Abay & Kassaye, 2015; Berhe, 2013). With regard to the employment status and occupation of the respondents at the time of departure, 45.4% were employed, 34.4%

were unemployed and 20.2% were students. The majority of the returnees who were employed before migration were engaged in agriculture, which is seasonal in nature in Ethiopia, and the others were employed in the informal sector, which generally does not generate a sustainable income. In terms of marital status, 58.3% of the respondents were never married before migration, almost 32% were married and the remaining 9.7% belonged to other categories (widowed, divorced and separated). The following sections present the findings of the study under each of the four themes that emerged.

### **Perceptions, expectations and goals of migration**

The study investigated the pre-departure perceptions, expectations and goals of migration of returnees (deportees) from Saudi Arabia in Saesie Tsaedaemba and Ahferom *woredas*, in Tigray region of Ethiopia. As reported by the majority of respondents, returnees had a broadly held positive perception about the rewards of migrating and working abroad before they migrated. For many rural youth and less educated people in the study areas, the Middle East, mainly Saudi Arabia, is seen as a place where money is plentiful and success is certain. Consequently, many youth (both male and female) drop out of school, leave their jobs, and lease out family land in order to migrate. Even though returnees were somewhat aware of the risk of abuse, death and other negative experiences during the migration journey and at the destination, they reported seeking and recounting positive success stories of early migrants and ignoring reports of negative experiences. They often argued that life is predetermined, whether you migrate or not, implying that it is your fate to have either positive or negative experiences. As reflected by the participants, the selective exposure of returnees to the positive side of migration before they migrated and the structural problems (poverty and unemployment) in the study areas resulted in them developing a strong positive perception of migration before they migrated. For instance, A8 explained the perception he had about migration before his departure:

*I had a positive mindset about working abroad as the only way of changing my and my family's life for the better. I had tried all the possibilities at home, but I couldn't succeed. Earning a living is difficult here and even harder for uneducated people like me. Hence, I preferred to migrate with the expectation of securing a better job and income. However, my migration experience was really horrible; I paid 20,000 Ethiopian birr [USD 860] to traffickers, took a long journey on foot without water to drink, and experienced frequent intimidation and abuse by the traffickers. Due to my sudden deportation, I left there [Saudi Arabia] with only two months' salary and my dream of a better future has been totally destroyed. (A8, face-to-face interview with author, Ahferom, 30 December 2017)*

The respondents described structural problems at the place of origin, such as lack of job opportunities and a decent income, as the major reasons for them to leave in the first place. During my field work in Ahferom, I witnessed a significant number of idle youth sitting along roadsides in Enticho town. In Saesie Tsaedaemba, the rugged nature of the topography, recurrent droughts and general degradedness of the area have left youth with little or no options for gainful employment. Consequently, communities in these *woredas* use migration as a livelihood strategy. T6, a 36-year-old female, recounted her dreams and expectations about migrating to Saudi Arabia:

*Economic problems and inability to get a job after I completed my TVET [technical and vocational education and training] were the main reasons that forced me to emigrate. On top of that I had the responsibility of caring for and supporting my family (my grandmother and my two kids). Hence, I decided to migrate to Saudi Arabia where I believed I could realise my goals and expectations – change my life and educate my kids properly. (T6, face-to-face interview with author, Saesie Tsaedaemba, 25 June 2018)*

Socio-cultural factors, like the desire of youth to get rich overnight and returnees' pre-migration exposure to successful returnees in their locality were reported as among the factors that influenced respondents to develop a positive mindset about migration.

According to the in-depth interviewees, seeking better-paid jobs and enough income to improve their and their family's lives were the main

goals of migrating to Saudi Arabia. However, many respondents said that they failed to achieve their migration goals and returned home empty-handed. Being illegal migrants, they were forced to return back to their homeland by the Saudi government. The deportation happened quickly, before the migrants were ready for the process of return. Hence, instead of improving their life, many ended up in financial trouble. One respondent, a 26-year-old male returnee from Ahferom, shared the following:

*I had been in Saudi Arabia [Riyad] for two consecutive years working illegally as a daily labourer in the construction sector. Following the Saudi government's sudden and unexpected deportation order, I was forced to return home without my wages. I left four months' salary behind because my employer was not in a position to pay my salary, so I was forced to leave it. So I did not bring back enough capital to enable me to reintegrate at home and now I am dependent on my family. (11G, face-to-face interview with author, Ahferom, 29 December 2017)*

In short, even though, respondents reported having a positive mindset about migration and working abroad before departure, their actual migration experience did not meet expectations. The majority of the respondents did not achieve their migration goals and this, in turn, inhibited their reintegration upon return. Many returnees were in a worse situation than they were when they left and were contemplating re-migrating, despite the challenges that they had faced the first time around.

### **Negative reception by families**

In order to explore the effect of the migrants' families' reception on the reintegration of returnees, we need to look at the pre-departure perceptions and expectations of families, their involvement in the initial migration decision-making process, and the benefits they derived from the migration of their family member. The results of the in-depth interviews carried out with families and returnees revealed that many families and parents have positive perceptions of migration. They saw migration as enabling people to generate more income than local employment. Consequently, parents often

encourage their children to migrate by telling success stories of some pioneer migrants and returnees in their neighbourhood. Interviewees said that only narrating success stories of migration and the reluctance of returnees to tell their families about their negative migration experiences has led to the development of a positive perception of migration among families. In most cases, migration was arranged and the final decision made collectively by household members. Parents and family members chose to send the migrant abroad because they perceived life in Saudi Arabia to be desirable; they believed that youth can easily make a large amount of money and the family can then receive remittances on a regular basis. N5, a 52-year-old father of a returnee, recounted the history of migration in the community and the value the community attaches to migration:

*In our district [Ahferom] migration began early. Many people have been migrating to Eritrea (before the border conflict), Israel and Sudan. Although there has been a change in destination, migration is continuing and this has become the norm in the community at large. Most of the households in the community have one or more family member with a migration history. This reflects the positive perception of migration. Families who send their children abroad are accorded a high social status in the community, compared to their counterparts. (N5, focus group discussion, Ahferom, 30 December 2017)*

As explained by the respondents, the majority of parents were involved in instigating and financing the migration, and expected that their financial investment would be returned. This is substantiated by the survey data, which found that 57.4% (n=125) of the sample returnees funded their migration costs through their parents or borrowed from relatives. In return, out of 218 respondents, 85% (n=185) reported sending remittance home while they were working abroad. As indicated by both the survey and qualitative data, migrants' remittances were used mainly for household consumption (food, clothes, education, health and social activities) and loan repayment, as well as to purchase assets and saving (Table 14.1).

Table 14.1. Use of money remitted by family of migrants

Purpose	Frequency	% (n=185)
Household consumption	96	51.9
Loan repayment	48	25.9
Purchase assets	13	10.3
Saving	28	11.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>100</b>

Being irregular in status, returnees were unable to save the money they earned at the destination, but instead had to send it home to their families (although getting the money back was a problem). It was argued that remittance contribution in preserving family welfare, providing quality of life, and generally reducing the vulnerability of the household is undeniable. B2, a 24-year-old female returnee, explained as follows:

*We [the youth] do have a responsibility to care for and support our families: for instance, I was in Saudi Arabia for almost two years working illegally as a maid and I sent money to my parents living in a rural area mainly to buy agricultural inputs and construction materials to renovate their old hut. However, it is untrue to say that all families who have a family member who has migrated are benefiting from migration. The lucky ones are few compared to the extent of migration in our locality. (B2, focus group discussion, Saesie Tsaedaemba, 13 June 2018)*

In short, the majority of returnees reported supporting their families back home from the income they earned while abroad. However, as viewed by the families of returnees, the support they obtained was not as life changing as they expected; it was allocated mainly to daily household consumption and repaying debts. Even worse, there were unfortunate families whose investment in the migration of their family member was lost. N5, a 52-year-old father of a returnee, recounted the loss faced by his family:

*Some lucky families have been benefiting from the migration of their family members, mostly the families of early migrants. However, currently, many families are becoming destitute because migration has wiped out their meagre resources. For instance, when my son repeatedly nag me to let him migrate, I spent 45,000 Ethiopian birr [USD 1,667] for his migration expenses. Unfortunately, he returned [deported] empty-handed after he had stayed four months in Saudi Arabia. (N5, focus group discussion, Ahferom, 30 December 2017)*

This excerpt shows that sending a family member abroad constitutes a major investment on the part of the family, who may sell household assets on the assumption that they will be repaid one day. However, as reported by the majority of families and returnees, their expectations and goals of migration are often not realised. It was argued that the untimely, involuntary return of migrants not only disrupts individual returnee's hopes and plans, but also those of the migrant's family, especially if they are unable to repay the loan they took to finance the migration. Returnees stated that they had intended to stay in Saudi Arabia at least until they had repaid the money that they borrowed. A4, a 23-year-old female returnee, recounted her migration process as follows:

*The community that I live in is prone to migration and when I was a student, I saw youth migrating abroad and succeeding, so I started contemplating how to migrate. I perceived that education would not bring about the same immediate gains as migration and decide to migrate illegally. To arrive at my destination [Saudi Arabia] it took me six weeks, although I thought the journey would take only two. Until I arrive in Saudi, I spent 40,000 Ethiopian birr [USD 1,481]. I borrowed from my elder brothers. I was working as a house maid for one year and then deported empty-handed. Now, I have nothing at my disposal, let alone to re-establish my live and reintegrate. I am unable to repay the debt I took and my family have become unhappy, which has created hostility with my family. (A4, face-to-face interview with author, Saesie Tsaedaemba, 12 June 2018)*

The above excerpt shows that the unplanned return of migrants creates a stressful experience for the returnees and their families. From the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, it became

clear that for households who relied on relatives and friends to loan them money to pay for migration, involuntary return without being able to repay the debt represented a particular economic setback for the entire family. Returnees interviewed stated that due to the economic loss incurred, returning to a situation of debt created an unwelcoming reception by their families and relatives and subsequent decrease in the care and support they received from their families. This often hindered the reintegration of returnees into their community of origin. The returnees who participated in the focus group discussions shared that borrowing money for migration has ruined their reintegration. The returnees who borrowed money from their parents, friends and financial institutions and did not pay it back are treated very badly. In addition to this, the communication among family members and the returnees is not smooth; most of them said that, as a result, they are not happy living with their families and prefer to re-migrate.

As explained by the returnees and their families, the untimely deportation of migrants not only negatively influences migration investment, but also ruins the livelihoods of low-income families who rely on remittances to subsidise their livelihoods. For instance, 7M, one of the participants in this study, described the extent to which his family was dependent on his earnings:

*Fortunately, I stayed three and half years in the destination country [Saudi Arabia]. When I was there, I sent money to my family once every three months and my family [my two kids and wife] were entirely dependent on that money for their livelihood and expenses. Now, being the only breadwinner in the family, I am unable to support my family and I am looking for possible options to re-migrate. (7M, focus group discussion, Saesie Tsaedaemba, 13 June 2018)*

In short, the majority of interviewees reported that their family's high level of dependence on remittances, which ended due to deportation, and the negative reception by family members hindered their reintegration and motivated them to want to re-migrate. It was argued that families in which remittances from migrants constituted the sole or largest source of income are particularly vulnerable, especially

those returnees who were not able to support themselves upon their return and became dependent on their families. It was explained during the discussions that although the families did not share their grievances explicitly with the returned family member, they were disappointed with their child's unexpected deportation, the loss of support (remittances) and the additional strain placed on their limited household resources. The following quote from an interview with 7W explains the situation:

*My family's reaction and reception when I returned back home was good; however, eventually, some of my family members became unhappy realising that the financial support from remittances had ceased. They were expecting at least to buy a house and educate my little siblings; but I was unfortunately not able to do all these things during my stay abroad. They do not see the challenges I have gone through; rather they only care about my money. I sent all I earned abroad and I have nothing. This has created a bad relationship with my family. Now, I am determined to re-migrate again. (7W, face-to-face interview with author, Saesie Tsaedaemba, 12 June 2018)*

In the same vein, key informants explained that at first families usually welcome the returnees back at their return. This is because they do not know the situation. They expect the returnee to come back with at least with some money to enable him/her to lead their life. But, as time passes, and when they realise that the returnee has been deported without enough money, they became unsupportive. Family members often compared returnees to other migrants who have returned with money. This influences returnees to think of re-migrating. Without networks and support from their family, reintegration into a community is difficult, if not impossible.

### **Socio-cultural feelings of shame**

As reported by the majority of returnees, the ultimate objective of their migration was to earn a better income to improve their livelihood and that of their family. However, most of the returnees were unable to achieve this objective due to unplanned deportation and the inability to use the money they had sent back home. A focus

group discussion with returnees and their families revealed that when families and communities had high expectations of migration, returning empty-handed created anxiety and feelings of shame about failure in returnees. In addition, key informants explained that in communities where migration has become the norm, the inability of returnees to fulfil families' expectation regarding the economic outcomes of migration resulted in the development of feelings of shame, loss, failure and stress on the part of returnees, which hindered reintegration. This shame is not only felt by the returnees, but by the whole family. The feeling was worse in returnees who were unable to repay the debt taken to finance their migration. As described earlier, A4 was unable to repay her migration debt: "Now my family does not know my address and I have no relationship with them, because I am afraid to see them" (A4, face-to-face interview with author, Saesie Tsaedaemba, 12 June 2018).

In addition, many interviewees said that the assumption by family members and relatives that the returnees had money, when the reality was different, made them nervous. All these sentiments made returnees feel inferior and uncomfortable living in their place of origin and hindered their reintegration. Most of the return migrants said that they spent most of their time with other returnees in other areas, usually in nearby towns. Furthermore, the involuntary return and interruption of hopes not only made the returnees feel like failures, but also made them behave badly towards family members. This behaviour also negatively affected relationships with family members and hampered the social and emotional reintegration of returnees. It was found that returnees who had maintained no or little contact with their families and friends in their countries of origin encountered difficulties establishing social networks upon their return, which are key to reintegration.

Many returnees explained that they are perceived by the community to have money, merely because they were abroad. They said that members of their community did not understand or believe their experiences, instead referring to returnees as 'deportees' (*tiruz* for man and *tirziti* for woman), which has negative connotations. In

addition, members of local communities stereotyped all returnees as having mental problems, having been raped, and as disobedient to their families and the community at large. This skewed perception of returnees made them feel ashamed and hindered their reintegrating into the community. A 24-year-old female returnee, explained the situation as follows:

*After I returned back home, I lived in the village with my family for three weeks, but later I became upset by the gossip and defamation by the local community. These things made me nervous in my village and forced me to leave permanently to live in a small town called Enticho [Ahferom] with other returnees whom I knew when we returned back home together from Saudi Arabia. (9Z, face-to-face interview with author, Ahferom, 29 December, 2017)*

On the other hand, it was pointed out that returnees often underestimate the local employment opportunities that are available. In the survey, it was found that although the majority of returnees were from rural areas, they did not want to live and look for job opportunities there. Similarly, in the focus group discussions, it was highlighted that returnees often do not want to work in low paid jobs, because they assume this will not improve their life. Returnees generally did not want to work in their local area if the job did not generate the minimum income they expected. They simply contemplate and gather information on how to re-migrate, instead of looking for ways to reintegrate.

### **Transnational ties and networks**

Research has shown that if individuals who are involuntarily returned have close family members or relatives in the deporting country, the impulse to return is very strong (Schuster & Majidi, 2013). In the present study, it was found that, in addition to the aforesaid challenges, transnational ties that link returnees with family members and relatives abroad hinder the reintegration of returnees. The survey data showed that 33.5% (n=73) of the sample returnees had family members or relatives either in the destination country (Saudi Arabia) or other countries. Social capital (meaningful ties with relatives and

family members abroad) provides a foundation for the dissemination of information as well as for patronage or assistance, which increases the likelihood of returnees re-migrating. The survey revealed that, from the total sample of returnees who had family members or relatives in Saudi Arabia or other countries, 57.5% (n=42) reported that they intended to re-migrate. In comparison, the figure for the respondents who had no family members or relatives abroad, but intended to migrate was 42.1%. Using the chi-square test, it can be said that a statistically significant difference in the intention to re-migrate was found between returnees who have family members or relatives abroad and those who do not ( $\chi^2=4.66$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $P=0.03$ ) (Table 14.2). The role of relatives or family members who live in the potential destination country is immense in perpetuating migration in the study areas. Here is an excerpt from an interview with a returnee (A3) that shows the effect of transnational ties and remittances in reinforcing irregular migration from the study areas.

*Since my return in May 2017, I have been doing nothing. I have no job, but have become dependent on the support I get from my elder sister who lives in Saudi Arabia. Now, I do not want to stay here anymore: my sister is insisting that I re-migrate and I am waiting for her to send me money to help cover the cost of migration. (A3, face-to-face interview with author, Saesie Tsaedaemba, 13 June 2018)*

Table 14.2. Presence of family member or relatives abroad and intention to re-migrate

Have family member or relative abroad (n=218)	Intention to re-migrate (n=218)					
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total (%)	Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ )	Degree of freedom (df)	P (significance level)
Yes	42 (57.5)	31 (42.5)	73 (100%)	4.66	1	0.03
No	61 (42.1)	84 (57.9)	145 (100%)			

<b>Total</b>	103 (47.2)	115 (52.8)	218 (100%)			
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The key informant interviews held with representatives of government offices, mainly the Youth and Sports Affairs office at Ahferom, also confirmed that the majority of returnees who re-migrated had family members, relatives or friends abroad. For instance, there were 3,989 returnees (deported from Saudi Arabia in the period 2013–2015) in the district, of whom 1,040 had re-migrated within one year after returning, paying a large amount of money to traffickers, which they received from family members and relatives who live abroad (Ahferom Woreda Youth and Sports Affairs Office, 2016).

### **Discussion and conclusion**

The results of the study on the pre-departure perceptions and expectations of people migrating from Ethiopia to Saudi Arabia revealed that returnees see Saudi Arabia as a place of milk and honey, where money is plentiful and success is certain. Although returnees were aware of the serious security risks and increased legal difficulty with being in Saudi Arabia, many of them had positive perceptions about migration before they migrated. The selective exposure of returnees to positive rewards and the success stories of early migrants and disregard for reports of negative migration experiences influence returnees to develop a positive perception about migration before they migrate. However, the majority of interviewees acknowledged a significant difference between their perceptions prior to travel and the reality they experienced at the destination. There was an overestimation or idealisation of the advantages to be reaped from migration on the part of the returnees and their families.

The returnees in this study had primarily migrated in pursuit of economic betterment for themselves and their family members left behind. This corroborates previous research findings that Ethiopians consider migration a good way to earn and secure a promising future (Busza *et al.*, 2017). In earlier times, especially in the 1970s, migration

from Ethiopia was mainly driven by political factors. However, since the 1990s, the primary motives behind migration from Ethiopia are economic factors: to move out of poverty and to augment family living standards. However, this study found that the majority of returnees did not achieve their migration goals owing to their untimely involuntary return and inability to bring back enough capital. This result complements the findings of previous research on Ethiopian female return migrants (see Ali, 2018; Alemu, 2018; Nisrane *et al.*, 2017; Zewdu, 2018; De Regt & Tafesse, 2015; Kuschminder, 2014).

In addition to the structural problems (poverty and unemployment) in the place of origin, which motivated returnees to migrate in the first place, this study found that experiences of deportation and thwarted migration goals add three factors that make the reintegration of returnees difficult and remigration more likely in the study areas: the negative reception of returnees by family and community members, the socio-cultural feelings of shame about failure held by the returnees, and the existence of transnational ties and networks of returnees. A study done by Schuster and Majidi (2013) demonstrates that cross-border migration is an expensive business, one that usually requires family support. Similarly, in the present study, it was found that family members and relatives usually invested large amounts of money to send a family member abroad, for which they leased out their land, sold assets and borrowed money from friends, relatives and financial institutions, on the assumption that they would be repaid one day from the returns of migration (Carling & Carretero, 2008). In a place like Ethiopia where there is no regular institutional support in times of crisis, household assets are an insurance against adversity for many rural and urban families. However, the unplanned involuntary return of a family member not only disrupts individual returnee's hopes and plans, but also those of the migrant's family in the following ways: First, the deportation of the migrant before they can achieve their migration goals leads to depletion of household assets that could have been invested locally or saved for the future. Second, in addition to the loss of household assets, inability to pay back loans taken to finance migration exposes families to conflict

with the returnees and the creditors, and even financial ruin. Third, deportation of a family member also affects the livelihood of low-income families, who rely on remittances for their daily subsistence.

When families and relatives have high expectations of migration, returning empty-handed creates an unwelcoming or negative reception for returnees from their families, which damages the relationship between returnees and their families. A study done by Ali on Ethiopian female returnee migrants found similar results. In that study all the female returnees said that they were welcomed by their families at first, however, many of them eventually encountered criticism. As the migrants' support for the family diminished, family members became unhappy, which created conflict (Ali, 2018). In addition to the accumulated negative migration experiences, the unwelcoming reception of returnees by family members exacerbated any existing post-traumatic stress or depression of returnees. Lack of understanding about the pain that returnees had suffered during their migration cycle and lack of support from family members compelled many returnees to hide themselves from the eye of their families, obstructing their reintegration. In addition to lack of understanding and support, misconceptions about return migrants held by local community members negatively affected the morale of returnees, which hindered their reintegration prompting them to re-migrate.

In addition to the negative reception of returnees by families, socio-cultural feelings of shame about failure held by returnees was found to be one of the factors hindering their reintegration. A study done on Senegalese migrants by Carling and Carretero (2008) had similar findings: in this study returnees were not only frustrated and angry, but also spoke of a sense of shame in relation to having failed and come home empty-handed. On top of the negative migration experiences of the returnees, the feeling of failure to meet personal and family expectations leads to hopelessness, social isolation and low self-esteem on the part of returnees, which hinders their reintegration. Schuster and Majidi, in a study on Afghan deportees, argue that the power of shame about their failure to meet expectations should not

be underestimated and that it puts pressure on returnees to re-migrate (Schuster & Majidi, 2013).

In this study, it was also found that the presence of transnational links and networks that connect returnees with family members or acquaintances in the destination country affect the reintegration of return migrants. Evidence shows that if an individual who has been involuntarily returned has close family members or relatives in the country from which they were deported, the impulse to return is very strong (Schuster & Majidi, 2013). The encouragement and pressure to re-migrate coming from family members and relatives living in the destination country hinder the reintegration of return migrants.

In conclusion, unless the structural problems (poverty and unemployment) that cause people to migrate in the first place are addressed, involuntary return without meeting personal and family hopes exposes returnees to an unwelcome reception by families and feelings of shame about failure, which lead to depression, hindering reintegration and influencing returnees to re-migrate. Thus, for migrants who are involuntarily returned and who have negative migration experiences, the mere provision of post-return material and financial support may not lead to their successful reintegration. Hence, improving the prevailing structural problems and the provision of psychosocial, moral and emotional support from family members, relatives, friends and communities at large are imperative.

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